Modeling the Way for Change: Senior Leadership Team Development in Hartford Public Schools

Modeling the Way for Change:
Senior Leadership Team Development in Hartford Public Schools

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Capstone

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Ironically, teams succeed because they are exceedingly human. By acknowledging the imperfections of their humanity, members of functional teams overcome the natural tendencies that make trust, conflict, commitment, accountability, and a focus on results so elusive.

—Patrick Lencioni

When leaders empower rather than control; when they ask the right questions, rather than provide the right answers; and when they focus on flexibility, rather than insist on adherence, they move to a higher form of execution.

—Amy Edmondson

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Abstract

Public school districts across the nation are exploring the best ways to support their schools, students, and communities, but in the context of educational reform, districts are underused as a lever for change. Hartford Public Schools is a portfolio management district serving approximately 22,000 students, who get to choose the program that best suits their needs from 52 schools in Hartford and more schools in the surrounding area. To be effective, Hartford Public Schools has to ensure that it provides high-quality educational opportunities for all its students. This capstone explores the district's process of transforming the central office by developing a senior leadership team to model the way for change in efforts to better support schools. I argue that developing a senior leadership team is an effective strategy for promoting change throughout the district when it includes a compelling direction, a value on teaming, a focus on learning, and a culture of trust. I describe my role in creating the conditions and establishing the culture that allow this new senior leadership team to thrive. This capstone offers important implications for district leaders, demonstrating that investing time, energy, and resources into developing high-functioning teams that learn to improve is critical for success. As the educational landscape evolves, teams who adapt quickly and learn together could be the key to ensuring district schools achieve at the same levels as the best schools in the nation.

Introduction

Context

> Not finance. Not strategy. Not technology. It is teamwork that remains the ultimate competitive advantage, both because it is so powerful and so rare. (Lencioni, 2002, p. vii)

Hartford Public Schools (HPS) is an organization that demands change to improve outcomes for its students. In 2014, the district and its board of education brought in a new superintendent, Dr. Beth Schiavino-Narvaez, in order to stimulate the changes they wanted for their students and community. To accomplish this goal, HPS needed to accurately diagnose its current situation and systematically understand where it wanted to go. These efforts would allow the district to continue to refine, reframe, and learn as it moved in that direction (Bolman, 2008). The senior leaders and the district understood that the superintendent could not work alone: several people needed to lead such large-scale change. To accomplish the established goals, the senior leaders started to organize themselves to suit the district's needs. HPS had the opportunity to organize a senior leadership team (SLT) effectively and model how school districts could evolve or improve to meet ever-changing needs.

To improve an organization, research has suggested that effective change comes from within and that it is more successful and longer-lasting if done collectively (Bryk, 2015; Packard & Shih, 2014). One way of bringing people together in service of a common goal is to create and cultivate a team. Some organizations do not succeed in sustaining organizational change because leaders fail to gain traction and implement the principal ideas with their teams. Despite bringing together a group of capable, confident, and dedicated people, the power and capacity to drive change does not always increase (Wageman, 2008).

Being a team, or rather being dedicated to the active practice of teaming, is no easy task (Edmondson, 2012a).

Although SLTs are susceptible to what every team experiences, some factors are unique to them. Within a large organization, senior leaders are often responsible for their own mini-organizations, or microcosms, in which they act as primary decision-makers. This power sometimes makes it difficult for senior leaders to see any need to work with others outside their departments (Wageman, 2008). If senior leaders lack a collective mind-set, however, they might continue to work in isolation, and then the people they lead might do the same, showing a lack of commitment to carrying out organizational decisions. The ambiguity created from a lack of commitment can cause uncertainty, and uncertainty can breed competition. Competition between groups might drive group members to protect themselves, what they know, and what they control, even at the expense of the team. Thus inattention to the work of the collective can lead to a team's undoing (Lencioni, 2002).

Another issue for SLTs is the notion of perceived competence, or ability to work together (Wageman, 2008). Although they are experts in their fields, senior leaders are not necessarily good at leading groups: they might have difficulty working with others and resist addressing their lack of capacity in this area. My capstone grapples with this driving question: How could a group of senior leaders organize themselves as a high-functioning team, and what practices could they employ to become more effective as a unit in carrying out their work of improvement and transformation?

Site

HPS is a large urban school district in Connecticut. At the time of this project, in grades pre-kindergarten through 12, the district had 52 schools and 21,949 students. There were 28 neighborhood schools, 20 magnet schools, and 4 charter schools. These varied

school models allowed for school choice. Since the landmark Sheff v. O'Neill decision in 1989, Hartford has been state-mandated to integrate schools throughout the district as well as with surrounding districts (Appendix 1 contains an overview of the Sheff vs. O'Neill decisions). To comply with this mandate, HPS used the portfolio schools model, in which students and families can choose a school to attend as long as seats are available.

The portfolio schools model allows those tasked with public education in the community to experiment with different ways of providing educational services. In Hartford, they researched, designed, and implemented new models for schools and innovative practices that they anticipated would get better results than those of existing schools (Hill, 2013). Some districts employed the portfolio model if they were "learning deserts," meaning they lack certain learning resources (Martinez, 2011, p. 72). Learning deserts developed in a context of low-performing schools, declining enrollment, decreases in funding, and school closures. In these environments, the portfolio management model was intended to ignite innovation, distribute leadership, and allow flexibility in providing high-quality educational opportunities to every student (Martinez, 2011).

A key component of the portfolio management model is the evolving role of the district and its central office. In the portfolio model employed in Hartford, a few high-performing schools had autonomy to drive change. Reform rested in the creativity of the school design team and the principal who implemented the vision (Hill, 2013). For the rest of the schools, the district became responsible for building the skills of the leaders until they were ready to be autonomous. The district role was to prepare principals for the responsibility of autonomy so they could explore choices and exercise decision-making power to become responsible for improving instruction and managing change (Ark, 2003; Martinez, 2011). District leaders needed to be adept at supporting schools' choices and

creating the conditions for all students to have high-quality learning opportunities (Hill, 2013; Martinez, 2011).

Dr. Narvaez arrived with extensive district experience in Springfield, MA, and Montgomery County, MD, and this was her first superintendent position. Dr. Narvaez envisioned transforming the HPS system of portfolio schools into a school system focused on teaching and learning for all students.

Dr. Narvaez worked with the nine-member Hartford board of education to make great progress on her vision since 2014. First, she and her team conducted a listening tour to see what was working and what schools needed most. This culminated in a transition report, which synthesized six major themes for all district schools (Appendix 2 contains the introduction).

This report confirmed what the superintendent believed. She was committed to central office transformation to better support schools as well as school improvement to better serve students, and she believed a case management approach could be effective. The case management approach was emerging in district office research because it offers a personalized approach to improving schools and knowing them well (Bryk, 2015). Individualized case management provides the construct to give schools, or departments, differentiated support that is best suited to meeting their needs and goals within the existing portfolio model approach (Bryk, 2015; Hill, 2013).

In HPS, assistant superintendents of instructional leadership served as the primary case managers, so Dr. Narvaez became more involved with them in July of the 2015–2016 school year.[1] The district was divided into five major portfolios containing 9 to 10 schools

[1]During the course of my project, there were changes in the portfolio teams. These included a role and title change from associate superintendent to assistant superintendent, which reflected a restructuring of the portfolio teams to address personnel changes on the senior leadership team.

each; an assistant superintendent led each portfolio. Every portfolio team had a unique perspective on school improvement, and each group of schools worked together to operationalize the HPS vision and mission and advance improvement.

While that work was happening, Dr. Narvaez wanted to make quick and dramatic improvements in student outcomes. In addition to the transition report, she and her cabinet team attacked some of HPS's major issues, including reducing suspensions by more than 1,000, complying with state legislation for special education services, and curbing chronic absenteeism. These focus areas highlighted Dr. Narvaez's commitment to high-quality instruction for all and keeping students in the classroom to be ready for learning.

In response to the transition report, Dr. Narvaez worked closely with her ten-member cabinet to translate the six themes into a strategic operating plan (SOP), Cultivating Equity and Excellence 2020. This plan builds on the strengths of what was already happening in HPS and addresses the major concerns of prioritizing the students and their experience and building adult capacity to lead for learning.

Cultivating Equity and Excellence 2020 rolled out in June 2015 (Appendix 3 contains the superintendent's note and some graphics). This plan became a critical tool to refocus HPS on its core business of teaching and learning; it promised to ensure high-quality education at every school.

With assistant superintendents driving the work in schools and the cabinet driving the work of the district, Dr. Narvaez recognized an opportunity to implement the new SOP well by increasing alignment and communication at the central office level. She organized her senior leaders in a new way by convening a senior leadership team (SLT) of the ten cabinet members and the six assistant superintendents. Her hope was that more communication, collaboration, and shared learning within this group would model what it

meant to develop leaders to lead for learning so that students were situated at the center of their own learning and remained the district's priority.

Strategic Project

The strategic project for this capstone centered on working closely with the superintendent and the chief of staff, Dr. Gislaine Ngounou, to develop the SLT. Primarily, my role was to create the processes, structures, and supports to begin facilitating team development and establishing team culture for the emerging SLT. This work helped create the conditions for cabinet members and assistant superintendents to form a new way of working together as they led and monitored the implementation of the SOP, Cultivating Equity and Excellence 2020.

I aimed to improve the alignment, communication, and collaboration of the emerging SLT by strengthening communication systems, using a collaborative inquiry process, and developing structures to support effective team building. This strategic project continued the significant work senior leaders had started in 2014. They had sought to determine how the central office could communicate with and support the schools' core instructional work more effectively. And while the work of teaming is never done, the SLT had made some headway in organizing themselves and their work toward improving outcomes for all schools and all students.

Organization of Capstone

This capstone is divided into four main sections. The first is a Review of Knowledge for Action (RKA), in which I explore four major areas:

- Historical context for school districts as a critical means of establishing equity
- The process of district transformation
- The conditions necessary for organizational learning and change

- Building teams and recognizing their power

The literature reviewed in the RKA represents the theoretical and research basis for the project I undertook in residency in July 2015. It establishes the rationale for selecting the potential inputs and suggests some expected outcomes.

The second part of the capstone describes the actual project, evaluates my operating theory of action, and presents the results I experienced and observed. The third section analyzes why the project unfolded as it did, examining the gap between theory and what actually happened. In the fourth section, I discuss the implications of the work, in which I outline the major themes of what I intend to take with me as I continue my journey in education leadership, what I hope HPS learned and could pursue as their next level of work, and what I hold up as a potential example for the education sector at large, including leadership in other districts.

Review of Knowledge for Action

Overview

Change can be difficult. People possess complex meaning-making systems that can make them resist change; teams and organizations, all made up of people, also tend to reflect this pattern (Helsing, Howell, Kegan, & Lahey, 2008). Organizations resist change, according to research, in part because change highlights the fragmentation of teams within an organization (Beyond the Status Quo, 2015). In mid- to large-size school districts, despite intentional attempts to re-create the district, improvement efforts have rarely permeated the majority of schools (Honig & Copland, 2008).

Besides being resistant to change, organizations sometimes fall into operating patterns that are difficult to break without consistent attention to challenging normalized behavior (Senge, 2006). Research suggests that this attention is effective when it focuses on the relationships employees have with themselves, between one another, and between teams (Barth, 2003; Kegan, 2001; Kegan, Lahey, Miller, & Fleming, 2014; Senge, 2006).

For districts to overcome the organizational habit of resisting change, research argues that central office administrators must be intimately involved in supporting learning throughout the district (Lumby & Foskett, 2011; Psencik, Brown, Cain, Coleman, & Cummings, 2014). This requires leadership that focuses on fostering personal and organizational learning. As Senge (2006) writes, "The core leadership strategy is simple: be a model. Commit yourself to your own personal mastery. . . . There's nothing more powerful you can do to encourage others in their quest for personal mastery than to be serious in your own quest" (p. 162). In addition to personal leadership, according to Dean Williams (2005), a responsible organizational leader is one who helps set the stage for people to shift values, behaviors, practices, and focus to survive a changing world. One could argue that the vision

of leadership is evolving beyond a single, charismatic leader to more effective work from a broader coalition or leadership team (Kotter, 2012; Wageman, 2008). Combining all thee views, the term *leadership* in this capstone refers to the activities of those who create the environment in which others can change values, adjust behaviors, and improve practice by modeling that work themselves.

The purpose of this RKA is to explain the historical context of school districts and show why districts remain potential levers for change. It examines how central office can help a district learn to overcome general organizational patterns and promote organizational learning. It also explores how adult development, relational trust, and psychological safety lead to effective teaming practices, which provide a basis for precipitating change in a district.

Related Historical Background

Education, and particularly the role of schools, has changed many times in the history of the United States. What began as a means of religious instruction gradually shifted to more progressive purposes that focused on critical thinking (Kohn, 2008). Since the end of World War II, the role of publicly funded schools has been the subject of political conversation, largely because of the increase in student attendance and the public money spent on education (Katznelson, 1985). The 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* addressed the inequities facing black students, including fewer materials and resources and less funding for black students than for their white counterparts, and led the Court to make illegal the racial segregation of schools by states (*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas*, 1954). Continuing racial discrepancies in school resource allocation led the federal courts to remain actively involved in school assignment policies across the nation

until the mid-2000s (*Freeman v. Pitts,* 1992; *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County*, 1968; *Mendoza v. Tucson Unified School District No. 1*, 2007)

For years before *Brown v. Board of Education*, the inattention to outcomes for black students created some disagreement within the black community about the purpose of education. Schools that educated black students lacked monetary and physical resources. Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois disagreed on the purpose of education for black students (Du Bois, 1903; Washington, 1903). The question of whether education was to maximize utility or power remains fundamental because the highly segregated context these men experienced still exists (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014).

For Washington, the purpose of education for all black men was linked to understanding the industrial complexities of capitalism and developing the economic independence and morality to provide for one's family. He believed that "no race can be lifted until its minds are awakened and strengthened" (Washington, 1903, p. 16). Du Bois believed education served to develop a cohort of leaders (the "Talented Tenth") to elevate black society. Du Bois posited a question that still rings true today for many children: "What, under the present circumstance, must a system of education do in order to raise the Negro as quickly as possible in the scale of civilization?" (Du Bois, 1903, p. 57).

During the 1970s and 1980s, the achievement gap between students of color and their white peers narrowed somewhat. Beginning in the 1990s, however, the gap widened again, with students of color again achieving at lower levels. This gap was not necessarily the result of any marked differences in student abilities (Lee, 2002). Instead, research suggests that structures and lack of support opportunities in certain environments could have made it difficult for some students to succeed. The fight for equality in schools intensified again early in the twenty-first century because traditional public schools were failing many of our

children, particularly children of color and those with economic disadvantages (Minow, 2010; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014).

Since the mid- to late 1980s, school districts' central office configurations have created barriers to student success. Particularly in urban areas, central offices became highly bureaucratic and could not function in ways that supported student learning (Honig & Copland, 2008). Factors related to central office ineffectiveness included threat of state takeover for poor performance, lack of capacity in the central office, or bureaucratic inertia that did not allow for change (Bryk, 2015; Honig & Copland, 2008; Senge, 2006; Wirt, 2005).

The Current Urgency of Improving School Districts

It is important to interrogate public school districts because they educated approximately 49.8 million students per year in 2013 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015). Between 2012 and 2025, this enrollment is projected to increase by another 6% to 52.9 million students, or more than 90% of all school-aged children in the United States. One could argue that many children, particularly students of color, students with socioeconomic disadvantages, and urban students, have been disproportionally undereducated by these public school districts (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014).

Schools, teachers, and central office all recognize that current district systems have not been working based on the disparate student outcomes they produced (Lee, 2002). Districts have become resistant to change as they struggle with the threat of state takeover, financial disempowerment, and state and federal sanctions for poor academic results (Honig & Copland, 2008; Wirt, 2005). Often the schools serving students with the greatest needs were penalized by governmental sanctions that limited financial and human capital resources and thereby made it even more difficult to improve student achievement outcomes (Johnson, 2015).

Given the high levels of enrollment and disparate outcomes, it has become critical to understand school districts and ensure that they evolve into more effective change agents because they must serve more children with greater needs.

Impediments to District Improvement

Structural impediments. Accompanying the increased use of public schools has been a growing sense that local boards of education and schools cannot meet the current needs of students or their communities (Fuhrman, Lazerson, & Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands, 2005). As a result, federal and state governance roles have tightened from the top. Concurrently, a movement toward local school governance, school control, and choice arose from the bottom (Wirt, 2005). Each force worked to improve schools from a different angle because of general dissatisfaction with the district's culture, values, safety, or curriculum.

Since the late 1980s, however, students have seen relatively little improvement, particularly those in poor and urban school systems, despite efforts to centralize improvement at the state level (Fuhrman et al., 2005; Tyack, 1974). During this time the binary debate dominating educational reform swung like a pendulum between a focus on equality and a focus on standards (Katznelson, 1985). Although this conversation was critical, it did not address the root causes of educational inequity.

African American and Latino students still attended schools with other students living below the poverty line, and white and Asian students were typically in schools with others from the middle class (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014). This meant that segregation by race as well as socioeconomic status still prevailed within public schools. In the political jockeying between school autonomy and state control, districts have not yet been effectively tapped as a lever to create change (Honig & Copland, 2008).

In addition to physical segregation, students of color have often experienced disconnects and structural impediments through cultural exclusion from the curriculum and expectations to conform to behaviors that are not culturally aligned while in schools (Carter, 2005). The standard for success crafted by the dominant culture became less attainable for students but was still prevalent as a measure of success. Even in schools serving predominantly students of color, teachers can unintentionally teach what they themselves have learned or experienced; namely, that students of color could expect society either to despise them or to overlook them (Carter, 2005; Kozol et al., 1997). Therefore, trust and connection can lack between schools and communities because their cultural goals do not often align (Tyack, 1974).

In response to the issues of physical and cultural segregation, central office leaders and principals sought to protect their position and identity or look for stability, with limited success (Argyris, 1997; Kegan et al., 2014). For principals, the easiest way to increase stability was to increase control, so they pushed for autonomy from the district. The central office legitimized itself by exercising authority over the schools. This jockeying for control was counterproductive for student and organizational learning. Being self-serving in these ways only promoted current patterns of behavior and impeded learning (Argyris, 1997). This was because self-interest created less space for recognizing one's own complicit actions in sustaining the status quo. Hence people both assigned blame to others and protected themselves from others' actions, thus creating a cycle of false assumptions and instability.

Cultural impediments. Research suggests that another reason districts tend to struggle with change is educators' beliefs that their personal experiences should drive district decisions (Honig, 2008). In such a personal profession as teaching, people collect data on their daily experience and believe these experiences are the most powerful teacher. Although

experience can be helpful for wading through ambiguity, it is unreliable as the sole rationale for decision-making. The problem that overreliance on teacher experience can create for districts is that experience can prove shortsighted. Interventions that could result in changing school and district performance often take longer than a single school year to bear fruit. When teachers and schools do not experience immediate results, they can become impatient with the district's slow-moving interventions (Hess, 2004).

Looking for short-term successes, districts often move from one "research-based" initiative to the next, not sticking with any single intervention long enough to collect useful data on its full impact (Evans, Thornton, & Usinger, 2012). The larger picture may not develop for years, so the wisdom that might come from long-term experience disappears in the focus on daily personal experience (Senge, 2006). Districts have ended up relying heavily on "learning through doing," without considering longer-term changes in processes and practices that might enable the change they wanted to see (Kerman, Freundlich, Lee, & Brenner, 2012).

As initiatives have swung in and out of vogue, the central office bureaucracy has grown, and new initiatives have been layered on top of those already in place (Fullan, 2006). In fact, this "initiativeitis" has rarely allowed one program to get enough traction to produce real benefits (Evans et al., 2012). In the face of poor academic results, school personnel have often seen the central office and their mandates as the enemy, and the district office has often faulted the schools. This cycle of internal blame does not create an environment that promotes evaluation of the actions of the intervention itself, which might be hindering change. In addition, the central office often eventually abdicates responsibility because when schools push back against programs, the district cites external forces, such as policy,

community politics, and government, as reasons they do not change initiatives; the inability to overcome the political landscape can thus limit change (Honig & Copland, 2008).

Approaching Change through a Human Capital and Leadership Lens

Organizational improvement literature suggests that human capital is the most malleable and available resource organizations have because people are the driving force in holistic change (Senge, 2006). Organizations have been known to improve most effectively when people develop and adapt to meet changing goals (Evans et al., 2012). Each person possesses an opportunity to add to the organization's culture and shared purpose (Kegan & Lahey, 2001). However, if people in the organization lack the imagination or passion to drive change, then those same people can quickly become the organization's biggest burden (Evans et al., 2012). Without the proper structures, support, and leadership, urban districts often find themselves in this predicament of people being a burden.

The power of an organization lies in the potential of its people to learn and intentionally change course (Arbinger Institute, 2010). Although human capital is one of the district's best and most easily accessible resources, district leaders have not been successful in improvement efforts when they do not prioritize the alignment of personal goals and group purpose in order to prepare for change (Argyris, 1997). When this alignment was missing, external attribution of failure can permeate district culture (Barth, 2003).

According to both organizational and district transformation literature, leadership matters in the organizational change process (Barth, 2003; Psencik et al., 2014). Without strong leadership, cynicism about purpose and processes can cripple the organization (Senge, 2006). This becomes particularly relevant for school districts because central office and district leaders play an important role in setting the systemic focus on improving outcomes for students (Honig, 2008).

SLTs, in particular, matter because they both embody and promote the organization's culture. These leaders can make a difference by being performance-oriented and by actively assessing and discussing the culture of the organization (Psencik et al., 2014). Such leadership can display the power to take risks and can create a sense of urgency in others. The senior leaders' efforts mean that their personal work parallels the work the rest of central office staff is doing (Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010; Lumby & Foskett, 2011).

Senge (2006) suggested that an organization could only learn if the individuals within the organization also learned. Kegan and Lahey (2001) corroborated this finding when they claimed organizations learn best when leaders realize they are also expected to learn. Therefore, in the present context of school districts, the work of the central office must be refocused on developing human capital to assist organizational development. The impediment to districts becoming learning organizations in the past has been simple: research suggests that districts' central offices often try to mandate change in schools instead of setting the expectation that they would also participate in this transformational work (Honig, 2008).

Approaching Change through an Adult Development Lens

Research suggests that organizational improvement is more effective when personal development is cultivated from within an organization, so that each individual feels part of the process and accountable to the outcome (Packard & Shih, 2014). To foster this environment, district staff members, including the leaders, must first prioritize their own adult development in order to name, appreciate, and engage in conversations across different cultures (Lumby & Foskett, 2011). In the pursuit of organizational learning, it has been rare that adults prioritize their own personal mastery to achieve their loftiest goals (Senge, 2006).

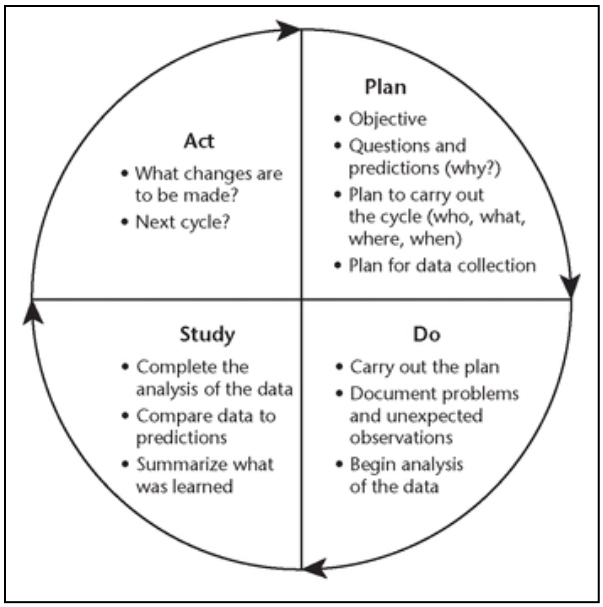
The literature in this area suggests people are most effective in their practice when they bring their full selves to work (Kegan et al., 2014) because their ability to be productive at work depends on their ability to succeed in their other identities, such as father, wife, or son (Barth, 2003). When people draw on all their identities and experiences, they offer a broader range of ideas and expertise. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954) suggests that self-actualization and developing oneself to the fullest unlock the greatest possible potential.

If all parties are willing to engage with their whole selves, new ways of acting and organizing in a traditional context can open up. As people increase their ability to hold self-complexity, or their multiple perspectives, in their environment, they can be more successful (Berger, 2012). Their increased success stems from their ability to see more nuances, to work with greater uncertainty, and to be more responsive to changing circumstances.

Approaching Change through Collaborative Inquiry

Research also suggests that school districts try to improve by creating structures and processes for collaborative inquiry (Bryk, 2010; Payne, 2008). Districts have looked for disciplined ways to gather data in order to analyze and assess the impact of their choices (Packard & Shih, 2014). Inquiry cycles include common elements of preparing for change, envisioning the new environment, implementing action plans, and assessing initiative impact (Bryk, 2015; Wagner et al., 2006). One collaborative inquiry process reflects these elements in a four-step process, called Plan-Do-Study-Act (Figure 1) (Bryk, 2015). Other collaborative improvement processes rely on just three basic phases: preparing for change, determining what should change, and acting on plans for change (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2013; Wagner et al., 2006).

Figure 1: Plan-Do-Study-Act Collaborative Inquiry Cycle



SOURCE: A. S. Bryk. (2015). *Learning to improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Applying this research to school districts suggests that central office attitude shifts toward learning together and examining one's own practice may benefit school districts. One collaborative inquiry process, the Data Wise Improvement Process (DWIP), addresses this possibility by working with district staff and requiring groups to adopt three ways of operating, known as ACE habits of mind (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2013). That is, groups commit to **A**cting, assessing, and adjusting their practice; they commit to **C**ollaboration, in which every individual is mindful of her own beliefs and work style preferences; and members hold a relentless focus on **E**vidence, to keep claims based in the shared data as opposed to conjecture (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2013).

Collaboration helps people see themselves as part of the learning and contribute to potential changes in a district. Research suggests collaboration can be powerful when the district and the schools work together. It is important that both the central office and school

staff see themselves as working toward the same goal, since skills from each group are necessary to affect change (Honig & Copland, 2008).

Collaborative inquiry offers an opportunity for schools and central office alike to learn as they work toward change. Learning, here, can be defined as the building of capacity to actualize new and ambitious goals (Senge, 2006). Patience with an organization as it progresses through inquiry cycles is important because the district, like most organizations, is likely to misstep in attempts to be innovative. The central office's ability to model a quick response after a misstep, thereby allows for some flexibility in the "learning by doing" approach and takes a longer-term view (Bryk et al., 2015). Shifting structures from a focus on personal accountability to a more collaborative and shared practice can be an example of an orientation towards learning. The leader and team members can focus more on how they might assist the work of the group through personal growth as opposed to justifying their individual actions to promote change in the school system (Kerman et al., 2012).

Approaching Change by Promoting Organizational Learning

Leaders tend to foster organizational learning more effectively by enabling a collaborative approach as opposed to a top-down bureaucratic one (Tuohy & Coghlan, 1997). School districts have tried to change and improve for years but often move in the wrong direction because they try to control change through micromanaging (Honig, 2008). A more effective strategy can be to cultivate change from within the organization by transforming central office itself into a collaborative learning organization, in which everyone feels accountable to the change process (Kotter, 2006).

One method for increasing learning has been to adopt an inquiry process that can be measured (Bryk, 2015). Instead of succumbing to habitual behavior, the individuals on the SLT in the central office would go through deliberate cycles of designing interventions,

carrying them out, and reflecting on their actions by assessing successes or modifying changes (Bryk, 2015). The team may benefit from taking risks and reimagining the work in a way that promotes learning (Edmondson, 1998). These intentional actions would show the central office turning into a learning organization (Coppieters, 2005).

Honig (2008) outlines ways district central offices can foster learning through collaborative engagement with schools to co-create a vision for work and culture. Central office leaders would evaluate their individual learning and explore the tools available to create a vision and promote change. This work supports the building of a broad-based coalition that extends beyond the top leadership of the district (Kotter, 2012). The exercise could help an SLT create the right conditions for schools and other leaders to understand the direction for change and how to see themselves in that process. More people could feel empowered to act and relentlessly pursue the goal (Kotter, 2006; Wageman, 2008).

An organization's orientation toward learning is apparent if it displays certain characteristics including commitment to a shared vision, high relational trust within teams, and psychological safety for team members (Edmondson, 2012b; Kotter, 2012). One difficulty urban districts have had with organizational learning is that people have viewed it as both a process and an outcome. Organizations that overcome historical inertia, build relational trust, and feel confident in experimentation can rely on psychological safety to fuel the process (Edmondson, 1998).

The Relationship between Organizational Learning and Relational Trust

One element of organizational culture that promotes learning is trust between members, meaning that they understand one another's emotions and can articulate why different team members make the choices they do as they learn how to work in new ways (Beyond the Status Quo, 2015; Edmondson, 2012a). The importance of trust and open

communication cannot be overemphasized: building psychological safety and relational trust enables people and organizations to learn.

The role of the leader in a school district is oftentimes to create the stable cultural foundation that prepares the central office staff for the practical and emotional change learning can bring. Leaders can ready the district by setting a direction for how the central office must change and by taking appropriate steps to move the organization there. In opening up this space, the leader can lessen the fear of change and uncertainty for the central office. When the leader narrates a clear vision, it can build relational trust (Lumby & Foskett, 2011). As people learn more about themselves and how those selves relate to the common vision, organizations can be transformed (Kegan et al., 2014). The organization can build a culture of relational trust based on shared experiences as staffers analyze and unfreeze old habits, implement change, and codify new habits (Beyond the Status Quo, 2015).

Trust increases when all members of the team bring their full selves to the work and recognize and celebrate when others do the same. This proves easier when relationships and trust are grounded in the work but not taken so seriously as to drown out the joy that signifies willingness to work together (Barth, 2003). Storytelling builds trust and fosters relationships in a team. "Every story—and storyteller—has value" (Barth, 2003, p. 3). Sharing personal narratives can allow people to learn from one another and build comfort between the storyteller and listener. Relating one's story can be a pressure release that provides the opportunity to reveal a personal part of oneself, share mistakes with one another, and celebrate learning successes. As people identify connections in their narratives, they begin trusting in one another and in a common purpose. The vision becomes truly shared when people commit to having a similar understanding as others (Senge, 2006).

As relational trust increases, individual learning efforts translate more easily to team effort. The more group members act like a team, the more efficient and effective they become (Barth, 2003; Senge, 2006). Collective actions that can speed up this learning become more applicable when the unit is designed for learning along at least two of three dimensions: management, challenge framing, and psychological safety (Edmondson, 1998; Edmondson et al., 2001). *Management* focuses on the daily interactions and structures to support team members, *challenge framing* refers to the narrative description of the task at hand, and *psychological safety* is a collectively held belief that taking risks does not damage one's position on the team.

Approaching Change through Teaming

Teams can be a unit for organizational change when they leverage the collective learning and actions of a group. Teaming is the active work of completing interdependent tasks (Edmondson, 2012a). Research suggests that teams can be successful along three dimensions: output of product, relationship between members, and opportunities for learning (Kahn, 2009). That is, teams can produce great results, work well together, and learn a great deal. New district leaders may not get to select every member of their team, so it can be difficult to approach teaming from a management viewpoint. Team members they manage are not necessarily selected based on factors such as how well they work with others, willingness to function in ambiguous situations, and consistency (Edmondson et al., 2001). Therefore, central offices in urban school districts must prioritize framing the challenge and building psychological safety to promote teaming.

The challenges teams face in promoting change in outputs and learning should be characterized as more than technical skill acquisition (Edmondson, 2012a). Technical solutions neither require working together nor necessitate the contribution of every

individual; therefore, skills-based tasks are less likely to create opportunities for teaming (Edmondson, 1998). Teaming and learning tasks tap into the shared vision of fundamentally reevaluating or reinventing the work of the organization, so they require new ways of working together. The leader is critical here because she needs to see beyond the technical competence to motivate and manage team members who have a variety of specialties that could be useful in a new paradigm for success.

In the effort to discover a new organizational order that works, research has suggested that teams can learn by trial and error (Kegan et al., 2014). This is more effective in psychologically safe environments, where experimenting is condoned and encouraged. Concrete structures for assessing real-time learning instead of relying on after-action reviews is critical (Edmondson, 1998). This intentional practice invites additional opinions, and it reinforces the relational trust that can allow team members to bring all their ideas to the work without losing any critical insights. Barth says, "When nondiscussibles are being discussed progress will be made" (2003, p. 18). Teaming can be transformative if leaders commit to supporting the work of both individuals and the collective (Senge, 2006).

Implications for the Strategic Project and Theory of Action

As Dr. Narvaez built on the successes of her first year and worked to galvanize stakeholders around the new strategic plan, she prioritized the idea of supporting adult development and teaming. In fact, a core strategy of Cultivating Equity and Excellence 2020 is to develop leaders to lead for learning.

Besides refining the case management approach, the superintendent believes that as a leader, she models the way forward for transformation. Research suggests that a leader who learns together with her team can serve as a model for the rest of the district to follow (Barth, 2003; Psencik et al., 2014). If Dr. Narvaez modeled supporting her senior leaders,

that model could filter through the organization. To enable better support for the leaders, she decided to develop a more expansive SLT, consisting of her ten cabinet-level direct reports, the six assistant superintendents, and me. With a newly forming team, she saw a chance to rearticulate the functions and purpose of her senior staff. This team would help align the cabinet and assistant superintendents' work more closely with each other in service of implementing the new strategic plan.

Research suggests that to sustain learning, organizations should focus intentionally on systems-level thinking, which would facilitate individuals' self-awareness as well as provide structural examples, shared vision, and team learning; the new SLT provided the perfect opportunity to do just this (Tuohy & Coghlan, 1997). The function of this SLT was to distribute leadership throughout the district while ensuring that the top-level decision-makers shared a vision and purpose. With such a large team, the superintendent recognized the need for clear communication. Pairing this understanding with Dr. Narvaez's desire to provide support, I developed the following theory of action for my strategic project:

> **If I created the conditions to develop stronger relationships between senior leaders, provided mechanisms to strengthen communication within the SLT, and integrated a disciplined and systematic process to reflect on practice, then the SLT would become a higher-functioning team, as evidenced by the team's articulating a shared vision and purpose, identifying more interdependencies in their work, and displaying the ability to make intentional adjustments as they implement the current SOP.**

This theory of action fit in with the district's strategic plan because in the core strategy of developing leaders to lead for learning there were several highlighted practices. This theory of action aligned with the district's work because it focused on promoting adult learning, being disciplined in using data, and developing relationships and teams.

Description and Results of the Strategic Project

Rationale for Focus on the Senior Leadership Team

Senior leadership teams can be important as a lever for change. I focused on the SLT for three reasons. First, the timing was right: cabinet leaders had already expressed a wish to include assistant superintendents. With strong implementation as a goal it was important for the assistant superintendents to be included because they would be responsible for translating the work to schools. Second, the stakes were high: Cultivating Equity and Excellence 2020 contained bold goals that required strong leadership, and the SLT was tasked with carrying out this important plan. The SLT could model the culture they wanted to see replicated throughout the district. Third, there was an opportunity to build coherence instead of having two groups working independently on the same goal. My theory of action suggested that the new team would unlock the power of this group to create improvements for schools and students.

The SLT was responsible for showing immediate results from the implementation of the strategic plan launched in June 2015. The renewed focus on results came in response to pressure from three sources. The Hartford board of education felt that last year the district spent too much time planning and sharing the transition report after Dr. Narvaez's entry (personal communication, Schiavino-Narvaez, September 18, 2015). Cabinet members had expressed surprise at the extremely poor test scores from the prior year, which contrasted with their anticipated positive outcomes (personal communication, Schiavino-Narvaez, August 31, 2015). Also, the Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium tests had showed the need for immediate and significant instructional improvement because fewer than 27% of the district's students were proficient in reading and only 14% in mathematics.

To meet the goals of the new strategic plan, the senior leaders had to reorganize themselves to implement the plan and follow it through. They were not accustomed to long-term planning and project management because in the portfolio model, they focused more on new program design (Hill, 2013). To create the conditions required for the SLT to adopt a focus on implementation, the leaders needed opportunities to redefine their roles and their shared work. Then they had to make sense of their part in adjusting the work of the SLT to meet the new goals of implementing the strategic plan. This coherence between expectations, purpose, and role would help to align their work for the 2015–2016 school year, with the idea of making intermediate progress on reaching the equity indicators in the strategic plan.

The senior leaders were the appropriate entry point for this project because the two subteams operated differently, and the new team offered an opportunity to redefine systems of accountability and processes for working through productive conflict. The leaders described their work as happening in silos (i.e., in isolation, with one area duplicating the work of another area); they described their work in inconsistent terms and often avoided conflict about following through on commitments (Lencioni, 2002). Formation of the new SLT presented an opportunity to address those issues, as dynamics would be changing.

Description of Strategic Project

I focused my efforts on developing a higher-functioning team in three areas: intentionality, effort, and time. Therefore, under the advisement of the superintendent and Chief of Staff Dr. Gislaine Ngounou, I embarked on the strategic project to actualize my theory of action: **If I created the conditions to develop stronger relationships between senior leaders, provided mechanisms to strengthen communication within the SLT, and integrated a disciplined and systematic process to reflect on practice, then the**

SLT would become a higher-functioning team, as evidenced by the team's articulating a shared vision and purpose, identifying more interdependencies in their work, and displaying the ability to make intentional adjustments as they implement the current SOP. In Figure 2, I outline the key work of my strategic project. The section that follows describes these strands of my theory of action in detail.

Figure 2: Key Activities of Strategic Project Theory of Action

Theory of Action	**Key Activities**		
If I…	**July–August**	**September–October**	**November–December**
Created conditions to develop stronger relationships	- Planned and implemented the SLT retreat	- Introduced the idea of consistent and purposeful team building - Included consistent use of smaller work groups for processing in meetings	- Designed shared learning about communication (using *Leadership and Self-Deception,* Arbinger Institute, 2010) - Reached out to an absent team member - Shared responsibility for facilitating team building
Provided mechanisms to strengthen communication	- Developed implementation plans - Instituted AA check-in meetings - Developed the SOP booklet with talking points - Consistently used protocols for meetings	- Shared the core work related to the SOP indicators - Introduced consistent use of feedback protocol - Collected feedback for iterating meeting cycle - Adjusted format and access to the schedule	- Left open space in calendar for emerging problems of practice - Shared the themes uncovered in the first round of interviews
Integrated a disciplined and systematic process to reflect on practice	- Relaunched Data Wise Improvement Process - Introduced a cycle of monitoring work	- Introduced cycling back to previous action items into weekly agenda - Stepped back to reflect on first round of monitoring - Checked in on Data Wise key tasks	- Stepped back to reflect on second and third rounds of monitoring - Assessed implementation of Data Wise Key tasks - Shared the Data Wise journey with the SLT

Key: SOP = strategic operating plan; AA = Acceleration Agenda.

Work Stream 1: Developing Stronger Relationships

Guided by my theory of action and the belief that the senior leaders had to form a coherent, effective team to implement the strategic plan successfully, I tried to assess the current state of the relationships and trust among team members.

Research suggests that relationships are part of the foundation for trust and recognition of the connection between interdependence and success. People must be willing to communicate and be vulnerable with one another in order to effectively address the complex situations that might arise at work (Lencioni, 2002). Trust can undergird teaming. However, building trust is especially difficult with teams of senior leaders, researchers claim, because they are used to running their own micro-organizations in the form of departments or siloed teams (Wageman, 2008). Interpersonal conflict is not absent in those micro-organizations, but little debate takes place on the merit of or rationale for actions. Disagreements mostly concern jockeying for control, or relinquishing responsibility for, the implementation of critical work (Senge, 2006).

Thus my first priority was to create opportunities for the new SLT to build relationships. We launched the formation of the SLT with a full-day retreat focused on team building: getting to know each other more deeply, learning work style preferences, and sharing in learning experiences. Teams often lack the luxury of time, and this full-day retreat allowed for both activities and reflection (Edmondson et al., 2001). The basic agenda for this retreat is in Appendix 4.

After the retreat, the next intentional effort to build relationships was to make consistent and purposeful team building a part of our regular practice. The team was consistently doing "good work shout-outs," by which they expressed appreciation for the work of others on the team, although often the recognition was for people from their own

departments who were not present. But not everyone approved: one team member vehemently explained to me, "Good work shout-outs are not teambuilding" (personal communication with Senior Leader 4, October 21, 2015). So I planned some more discrete teambuilding activities and exercises. The team building I designed became a regular part of meetings, in addition to good work shout-outs, so as to build on a positive practice that was already in place.

The SLT also started using small group work more consistently to ensure people got to work with all the other group members. Research suggests one way to build relationships is to produce some work product together, and the smaller groups supplied that opportunity (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2013; Edmondson et al., 2001; Senge, 2006). The small groups also provided a safe environment in which to express personal opinions and to disagree. Taking risks with personal opinions requires trusting that others would not attack or ostracize someone for their ideas (Kotter, 2006). This vulnerability can foster the development of trust (Lencioni, 2002).

In addition to discrete team-building experiences, the SLT also began studying the book *Leadership and Self-Deception* (Arbinger Institute, 2010). The superintendent and I selected this book because it focused on the communication between people on a team and how relationships and recognizing others as people instead of objects allowed one to get out of her own way in achieving success and happiness. This framework helped people understand their own biases and responsibility for potential miscommunications, which built a potential foundation for trust.

Work Stream 2: Implementing Mechanisms to Strengthen Communication

As the senior leaders worked to build stronger relationships and communicate the vision for the district more effectively, it was important for the SLT to focus on providing

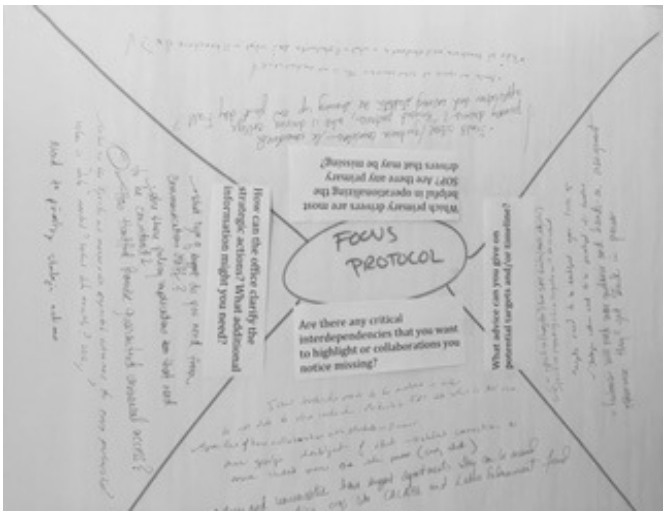
mechanisms to strengthen communication. In this project, communication was designed to allow for consistent messaging about the work, and to be a sign of collective buy-in and shared ownership (Senge, 2006). This aligned to Dr. Narvaez's prior work because she consistently ended each meeting with key messages, to ensure that leaders left with consistent language.

Setting up time to discuss sharing the ownership and responsibility for change is one way leaders can promote lasting change (Kotter, 2012). This is particularly important for SLTs because they need clarity about the purpose of working together and the work of achieving organizational goals (Wageman, 2008). This work took time, which the superintendent actively created. She set up a series of additional meetings to check in every week on the progress of key tasks for the Acceleration Agenda, a strategy in action from the strategic plan that aimed to accelerate progress in six low-performing neighborhood schools. The ability to communicate a simple, clear, and consistent message about the new direction for the team could go beyond relaying the message to others; it might become a way for the team to accomplish more work because the messages may inspire them by being "a force in their hearts" (Senge, 2006, p. 192).

A second aspect of developing mechanisms for communication was to move from relaying information to co-constructing the messages from leadership. One way to accomplish this was for the senior leaders to understand each other's work better and identify connections across offices. An example of the type of work I did here was the Placemat Protocol. The superintendent asked for implementation plans from every senior leader to streamline access to and understanding of each other's work. I facilitated a feedback protocol, in which senior leaders got to appreciate and push each other's core work so that they left with a more shared understanding of how the offices worked together.

Figure 3 shows an example of how this protocol unfolded, with different senior leaders adding their ideas to develop one focus.

Figure 3: Placemat Protocol Complete with Group Thinking



Developing structures that allowed information to flow between senior leaders became an important aspect of this project. Therefore, the SLT started consistently using the Plus/Delta protocol (discussed in Results, Work Stream 2: Increasing Mechanisms for Communication) at the end of meetings to ensure that the senior leaders' experiences were improving over time. Being able to communicate across offices and expertise could lead to a higher-functioning team because people could more easily see how each aspect of the work fed into the overarching goal (Edmondson, 2012a).

Opening the flow of communication between the superintendent's office and the senior leaders set the stage for one of the major activities in this strand of work: to communicate the intent and impact of monitoring strategic plan implementation that was happening within the SLT meetings. After each four- to five-week cycle of monitoring, all the senior leaders could say how they experienced the set of meetings and what adjustments they would like to see. My work was to make changes based on their feedback in order to

improve the next round of monitoring. One of the ways the SLT continued this work was to open up the monitoring schedule to include more of the senior leaders' core work and allow more people to participate in the monitoring process and communicate their work and progress to the team. This approach echoes recent models of leadership. According to Psencik and colleagues (2014), education leaders act in specialized ways:

> Leaders, through disciplined thoughts and actions, create and sustain the conditions that ensure achievement of our moral purpose by:
> - shaping a shared vision and commitment to action for academic and social success for all students;
> - developing systems that support students and adults;
> - modeling and cultivating courageous leadership; and
> - distributing responsibility for people, data, and processes that nurtures a culture of continuous improvement and empowerment (Psencik et al., 2014, p. 12).

Work Stream 3: Integrate Disciplined Processes to Reflect on Practice

When I started at HPS, the superintendent made me aware of three things. She wanted to review data on a more consistent basis to assess progress toward annual goals. She wanted to use a more systematic approach to including the previously used collaborative inquiry process to reflect on district choices, and she wanted to be sure these choices were leading to improved outcomes for students.

Last year, SLT members were surprised by some of the outcome data at the end of the year; this year, they started out believing that monitoring implementation more consistently and closely would lead to improved outcomes. When I arrived, the superintendent was committed to using a tight monitoring cycle. Each week, during the three-hour SLT meeting, she and the team would hear about progress on four major strands of work (Table 1). The strategic plan focus on "Disciplined Use of Data and Teams" drove this work. In an effort to build on the work of the previous year, it was also a focus for the new SLT.

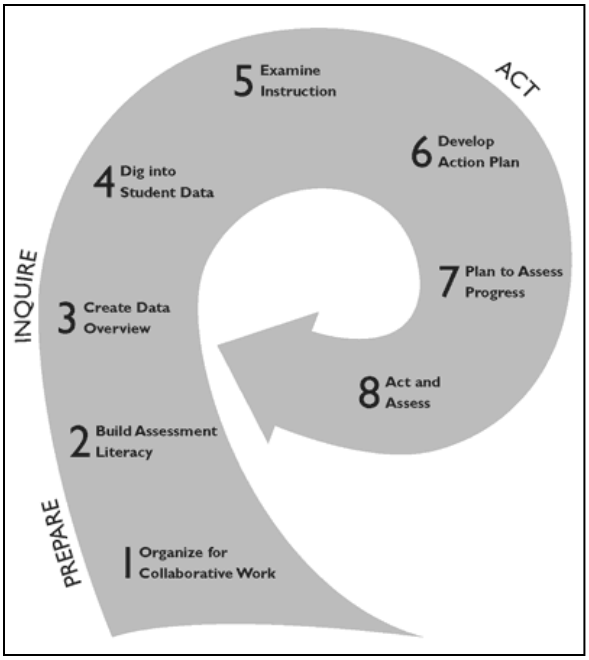
Table 1: Initial Monitoring Calendar for the Senior Leadership Team

Week 1	Acceleration Agenda
Week 2	Academic Equity Indicators
Week 3	Schools Study
Week 4	Culture and Climate Equity Indicators

In some studies, using a collaborative inquiry helped teams become higher functioning because it made them reflect on practice. The idea of using a collaborative process as a tool to model how to use data to drive decision-making meant that the senior leaders would be showing central office, principals, and schools what the district values were (Honig, 2008).

The collaborative inquiry process that began in HPS in 2014 and became a core part of the formation of the SLT was the Data Wise Improvement Process. Data Wise is a collaborative inquiry process where the team organizes to work together, examines evidence of their practice, and then assesses impact to adjust and improve their work as necessary. This process is broken into three major phases: Prepare, Inquire, Act (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2013) (Figure 4). This process was a strategic fit for HPS because it focused on organizing for collaborative work as a prerequisite to inquiry. This could be one opportunity to build relationships on the newly forming team. Several of the senior leaders were familiar with the process, so it built upon their current skills and the good work started the previous year. And, the process required the team to look at data – a priority area for the superintendent. The habits of mind at the core of Data Wise also dovetail nicely with the work of developing a team. The process required a foundation of the ACE habits of mind: Commitment to Act, Assess, and Adjust, Intentional Collaboration, and a Relentless Focus on Evidence (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2013).

Figure 4: The Data Wise Improvement Process Swoosh



Source: K. P. Boudett, E. A. City, & R. J Murnane. (2013). *Data Wise: A Step-by-Step Guide to Using Assessment Results to Improve Teaching and Learning.* Rev. and expanded edition. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

During the launch of the SLT, I reintroduced Data Wise as a tool for reflecting on practice. We spent time in the preparation phase of organizing for collaborative work by recognizing team members' work style preferences and taking stock of the practices already in use at HPS that aligned with the strategic plan. Most importantly, the superintendent made it clear we were committed to this process; adopting a unified approach was one of the conditions for successful disciplined use of data, and it set the stage to communicate more clearly and monitor more closely the work happening throughout the change process for the district (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2013; Kotter, 2006). One of the main tenets of Data Wise is a commitment to constant reflection on the process and adjustments in real time. So, using the information collected from the Plus/Deltas communicated, I continued to tweak the ways we used this process and monitored the strategic plan.

Results Overview

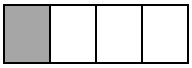
The purpose of this project was to help the senior leaders of HPS develop into a high-functioning SLT. High-functioning teams are developed over time. This strategic project represents a snapshot in the SLT's development process. They started their journey a year before my arrival and continued after the conclusion of this project. In public education, teams can be fluid constructions, and this team's membership changed even during the project. This section outlines how the project unfolded and the ways I have observed, quantified, qualified, and assessed its impact during my residency in HPS. I used multiple data sources as evidence to determine what happened and to monitor potential impact over time.

1. Two Semi-standardized one-to-one interviews with each senior leader (questions in Appendix 5)
    a. Cycle 1
    b. Cycle 2
2. Study of available HPS documents (samples in Appendices 2, 3, and 6)
    a. The HPS transition report
    b. The strategic operating plan Cultivating Equity and Excellence: 2020
    c. Meeting agendas for cabinet and SLT meetings
3. Formal survey data[2](Appendix 7 includes survey questionnaires)
    a. Baseline survey data
    b. Data Wise Improvement Process Implementation Survey Data
    c. 5 Dysfunctions of a Team survey instrument[3]
4. Observation data (observation form in Appendix 8)
    a. Formal observations
    b. Informal conversations

Figure 5 summarizes these results in relation to the theory of action I implemented.

[2] The number of survey respondents is not consistent throughout all the surveys because participation was optional. In addition to overall participation being optional, respondents could also skip individual items within a particular survey.
[3] (Lencioni, 2002)

Figure 5: Summary of Strategic Project Results

Theory of Action	Success	Key Results
If I… created conditions to develop stronger relationships		+ SLT meetings began with team building to foster relationships. + The SLT engaged in a few shared learning experiences. - SLT had yet to engage in enough authentic opportunities or to experience a trusting/psychologically safe culture.
Provided mechanisms to strengthen communication		+ Members identified structures to use to communicate. + SLT developed feedback mechanisms with Dr. Narvaez and each other. - Despite structural changes, many senior leaders felt out of the loop, which led to a lack of commitment and lack of consistent communication about decisions.
Integrated a disciplined and systematic process to reflect on practice		+ The SLT adopted Data Wise, a collaborative improvement process. + SLT members identified steps of the Data Wise Improvement Process and routinely examined data. - The SLT did not consistently align actions to the shared evidence base.
Intended Outcomes	**Success**	**Key Results**
Then the SLT will… become a higher-functioning team, as evidenced by…		
Articulating a shared vision and purpose for being a team		+ SLT members recognized multiple purposes and expressed increasing confidence in these purposes. - Fewer senior leaders articulated the intended purposes as time went on. - Shared purpose did not lead to trust on the SLT.
Identifying interdependencies in aspects of their work		+ Senior leaders described feeling more deeply connected to others through this work. + Most senior leaders identified at least one new thought partner since the SLT launch. - The team experienced inattention to collective results.
And displaying nimbleness by making intentional adjustments.		+ The SLT used feedback to adjust structures. + The SLT addressed concerns of members in real time. - SLT nimbleness remains at the technical/structural level rather than the team function level.

Work Stream 1: Creating Conditions for Stronger Relationships

Building strong relationships traditionally takes time, so I attempted to create the conditions the SLT could use at the time and in the future. I looked at the first work stream of my strategic project about **creating the conditions for building stronger relationships** from three perspectives. First, I assessed the creation of intentional opportunities for the SLT members to come to know each other personally. Secondly, I assessed the opportunities designed for senior leaders to develop relationships. Third, I took stock of whether these relationships translated to more relational trust and psychological safety on the team.

Intentional opportunities. Although meetings of senior leaders occurred every week, at the start of this project there was no consistent time devoted to team building. Good work shout-outs, in which team members recognized others for the work they were doing, were often included in meetings, but I learned through individual conversations that the senior leaders did not feel the shout-outs were actively building the team. I observed this to be an accurate assessment because in the project's early stages, senior leaders often complimented their own teams and people who were not in the room as opposed to recognizing the good work happening among the people in the room.

Because of the work done in Work Stream 1, creating conditions for building relationships, the SLT meetings began to consistently allow the time for team building and be intentional about the types of activities used to foster relationships. One piece of evidence for this was that in September, meeting agendas began to include consistent time for team building. In July through September, only 5% of meeting time was allotted for building relationships; by mid-December that number had increased to 11% of time allocated. At the end of February, the time was 12.48% of total meeting time (Table 2).

Table 2: Breakdown of Select Planned Time for Senior Leadership Team Meetings

SLT Activity	**% Planned Time**
Strategic Plan Work – Acceleration Agenda	16.00
Core Work Problems of Practice	12.95
Team Building	12.48
SLT Learning	12.29
Key Messages	3.81
Strategic Plan Work—Culture	2.76
Follow-up on Previous Action Items	1.90
Plus/Delta Protocol	1.81

In addition, the new activities began to make sense to senior leaders. As I started to share the facilitation of these team-building activities, about 40% of senior leaders stepped in to utilize their skill-sets in this area. I also observed that the person leading the team building chose to articulate the purpose of the activity by relating it to the work for the meeting or acknowledging that its purpose was to get to know one another better. On November 5, 2015, during an activity in which SLT members had to articulate positive things about each other's work and their own, one senior leader rolled her eyes and visibly sighed at the start of the activity. By the end of the exercise, she had said, "I didn't want to do that, but it turned out to be really good and really positive" (Senior Leader 8, November 5, 2015).

Quality of opportunity. I made several attempts to create quality opportunities to build relationships. One method was to work collectively and learn via shared experiences. Although the cabinet had spent some time before this project learning about the stories of schools and the Data Wise Improvement Process, very little time had been assigned to shared learning once the SLT formed. As a result of this project, three distinct moments of collective learning occurred when the group studied shared texts to better understand

themselves and how they related to the team. Each learning experience centered on a text as a starting point to ground people in the work. After each experience, the team made commitments to their own leadership practice and core work. One indicator of progress was that, although there was no public sharing of commitments after the first learning session, each person publicly shared a commitment anonymously after the second session.

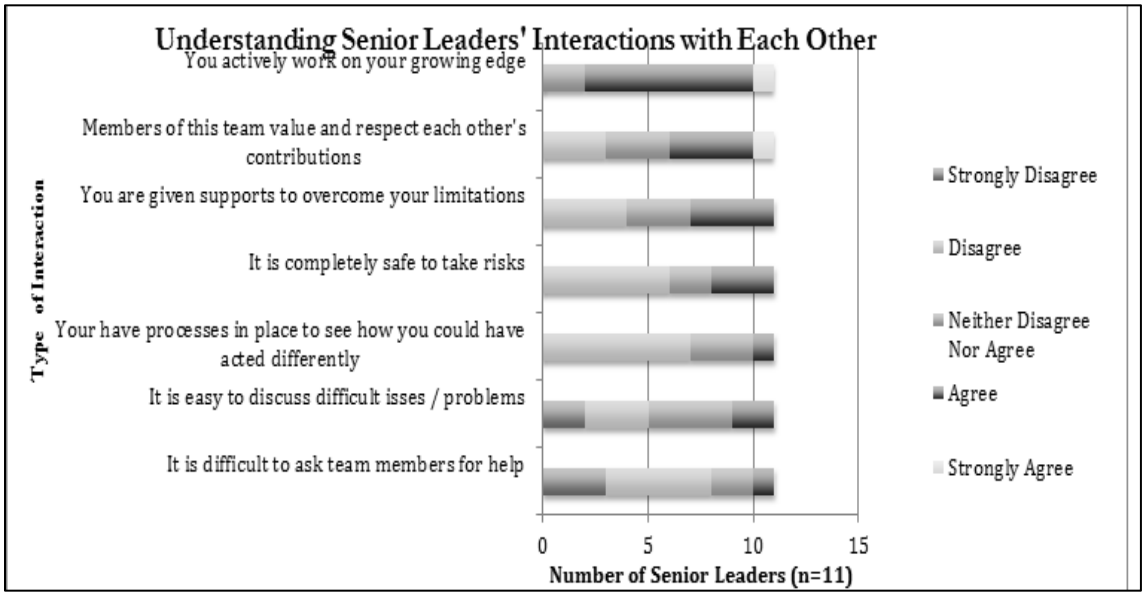
I tried to activate different types of relationship building. One SLT member had been absent from the team since before I arrived in July. The team had reached out to her at the beginning of her absence, but it was time to follow up and continue to build relationships with her while she was away because she was expected to rejoin the team in January. The SLT members from the cabinet designed handmade cards for her. Creativity in this form can activate a part of the brain that facilitates original thinking (Willingham, 2009). The team member expressed her feelings of inclusion via email. I include an excerpt below:

> Awwww . . . I LOVE them!!!!!!!!!!! Thank you all so much for the cards and well wishes!! So colorful, creative and filled with warmth and heartfelt wishes!! Your support and thoughts mean more to me than words can describe . . . . Your cards and wishes came just when I needed them the most!!!!!! I am so very thankful and feel blessed to be part of a GREAT team! You all remain in my thoughts and I will see you soon! (Senior Leader 2, November 30, 2015)

Other team-building activities the SLT engaged in were games to get to know one another and share personal strengths, such as communication games and reflective activities. Several senior leaders did not think these activities fostered the building of real relationships. One senior leader went so far as to say, "You assume this is a team and that people are invested in making it better. This is just a group of people who work together" (Senior Leader 3, October 15, 2015). In a baseline survey administered at the start of this project, 6 of 11 respondents disagreed with or were neutral about the statement, "Members of this team value and respect each other's contributions." In addition, 6 of the 11 did not feel it

was completely safe to take risks and two others remained neutral there. On the other hand, 8/11 disagreed and 2/11 were neutral about the statement, "It is difficult to ask team members for help." Figure 6 shows selected responses to the baseline survey.

Figure 6: Senior Leaders' Responses to a Baseline Survey



Intentional, quality opportunities translating to relational trust. In Work Stream 1, the intent was to create conditions for building stronger relationships. I sought to add time in the meeting agendas to build relationships, share high-quality learning experiences, and add opportunities to work in smaller groups. At the end of this project, SLT members routinely recognized only one of these interventions, the team-building activities. Nevertheless, 12/15 members consistently felt comfortable as a group member.

Table 3: Structures That Senior Leadership Team Members Recognize as Opportunities to Build Relationships

Activity	Number of SLT Members
Team-building activities	**10**
Working in small groups at meetings	**3**
Seeing ourselves in the work (cultural competence)	**1**
Opportunities for various leaders	**1**

One pattern I recognized during individual interviews was that the comfort of senior leaders did not fully translate to feeling relational trust. Although 100% of senior leaders felt that at least some of their colleagues were committed to high-quality work, there was no sense of how that work fit together to build a team. As shown by the Five Dysfunctions of a Team survey at the conclusion of this project, absence of trust was still one of the major dysfunctions with 11 senior leaders believing it still needed to be addressed. This was second only to the avoidance of accountability where 12 senior leaders believed the team needed to address this issue (Lencioni, 2002). Table 4 shows how the team experienced the dysfunctions.

Table 4: Senior Leaders' Experiences of the Five Dysfunctions of a Team

Dysfunction	Needs Addressing (n=16)	Could Be a Problem (n=16)	Not a Problem (n=16)
Absence of trust	11	3	2
Fear of conflict	4	10	2
Lack of commitment	6	9	1
Avoidance of accountability	12	4	0
Inattention to results	8	7	1

Work Stream 2: Increasing Mechanisms for Communication

Intentional communication was so important to Dr. Narvaez and Dr. Ngounou that they selected it as the theme for the retreat and a focus for the year. At the start of this project, communication was an area the team identified as less developed. In the baseline survey, 5/11 disagreed or strongly disagreed that it was easy to discuss difficult issues and another 4/11 were neutral on that point. This left only 2/11 who agreed it was easy to discuss difficult issues. In the same survey, 7/11 senior leaders disagreed that they have

processes in place to determine how they could have acted differently and another 3/11 neither agreed nor disagreed with the point at the start of this project.

Structures for communication. One intention of Work Stream 2, increasing effective communication mechanisms, was to develop systems and structures. Ending each meeting with the key messages, or consistent takeaways, was a helpful communication practice that had been in place since last year. Besides key messages, two other structures were added, both of which allowed for the flow of ideas and work throughout the SLT.

The first structure the SLT tried out was adding a section to their meetings for checking in on previous action items to ensure that everyone knew where important projects and tasks stood. The SLT allocated almost 2% of meeting time, or 100 minutes over the course of nine meetings, to follow up on items. While the team planned for this to take 5–10 minutes generally, I observed that following up often ran over that time. Energetic conversation took place around these follow-up steps, as evidenced by people building on each other's ideas and offering to meet elsewhere to continue trains of conversation that could not be contained within the time limit.

Further observational evidence about increases in communication was that now senior leaders began looking for the minutes from previous meetings to build on prior work, they were sharing via email the collective and compiled thinking from small group sessions, and they asked for more coherence across the commitments and assignments they acquired during meetings.

The second communication structure the SLT tried was creating offline times for communicating about cross-functional work. The superintendent started meeting with assistant superintendents in small groups every other week. She also convened smaller

working teams around major bodies of work, such as student success plans from the SOP and professional learning.

These mechanisms for communication resonated with senior leaders in a more holistic sense. In fact, 11/15 senior leaders responded that yes, they did have systems and structures for communication. However, when they were pressed to name the structures, their responses did not reflect the intentional structures from Work Stream 2. Table 5 contains the list of structures senior leaders identified for communication.

Table 5: The Systems and Structures Senior Leaders Identify to Strengthen Communication

System or Structure for Communication	Number of Leaders
Key messages	5
Grounding communication in the strategic operating plan	3
Consistency of messaging throughout district audiences	2
Expanding team to include assistant superintendents	2
Roundtable at SLT meetings	2
Protocols used for discussion	2
Including SLT on board of education updates	1
Goals stated on agenda	1
Designated time to meet	1

Feedback as a form of communication. Improved communication proved to involve more than just changing the structures for senior leaders to receive information; it also meant increasing their opportunities to communicate with each other, the community, and Dr. Narvaez. Another improvement in mechanisms for communication was the consistent collection of feedback. Using the Plus/Delta Protocol at the end of meetings gave Dr. Narvaez a real-time check-in on how the leaders felt and experienced the work. This protocol allowed team members to actively reflect on what went well to facilitate their work and learning and what could have been done differently to facilitate their learning. Each week, I compiled and used this feedback to adjust how the meetings were planned. I include a sample of feedback in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Sample of the Plus/Delta Feedback Collected

Meeting Date	Pluses	Deltas
October 22, 2015	• Spent more time digging into data • Check-in on previous action items created lots of energy and connections	• Spend even more time looking at data • Need more time for action steps: how do we relate steps back to schools?
November 5, 2015	• Community builder went well • Clarity of data sets	• Coherence of implementation plans and the new action plans being developed • Clarity of next steps based on the protocol
December 17, 2015	• The protocol for looking at data • Having cultural competency on the agenda • Being able to hear others' opinions on data	• Stuck in the cultural competency conversation • Having conversations but not courageous ones yet • Not addressing operational issues that affect the organization as a whole
January 7, 2016	• Having two focus areas for our work to dig into data and examine practice • Calling out that DWIP is the improvement process we will use • Protocol around mid-year success was nice transition back • Recurring theme is people like interaction about the work	• Still missing a framework for what we are, what we as a ***team*** should aspire to • Continue to refine clarity of purpose for team itself • Assistant superintendents going in and out of the meetings

Key: DWIP = Data Wise Improvement Process.

The SLT allocated about 5–10 minutes per meeting to the Plus/Delta Protocol, which remained consistent since October 8, 2015. I noticed this practice as systemic when we were going to skip this protocol at one meeting for lack of time, and one senior leader actually asked for it and provided feedback anyway (October 15, 2015). Commitment to this practice showed up in my individual interviews, when 14/15 senior leaders believed their opinion counted in at least some situations.

Having structures for communication vs. feeling confident in communication. Despite effective structural changes and members believing that their opinion counted, communication remained an issue for the SLT. At the end of this project,

most senior leaders still did not feel like they have adequate and accurate information to communicate effectively, as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Do you, as a senior leader, feel "in the loop" on the senior leadership team?

Answer	Number of Senior Leaders (n = 15)
Yes	3
No	6
Somewhat	6

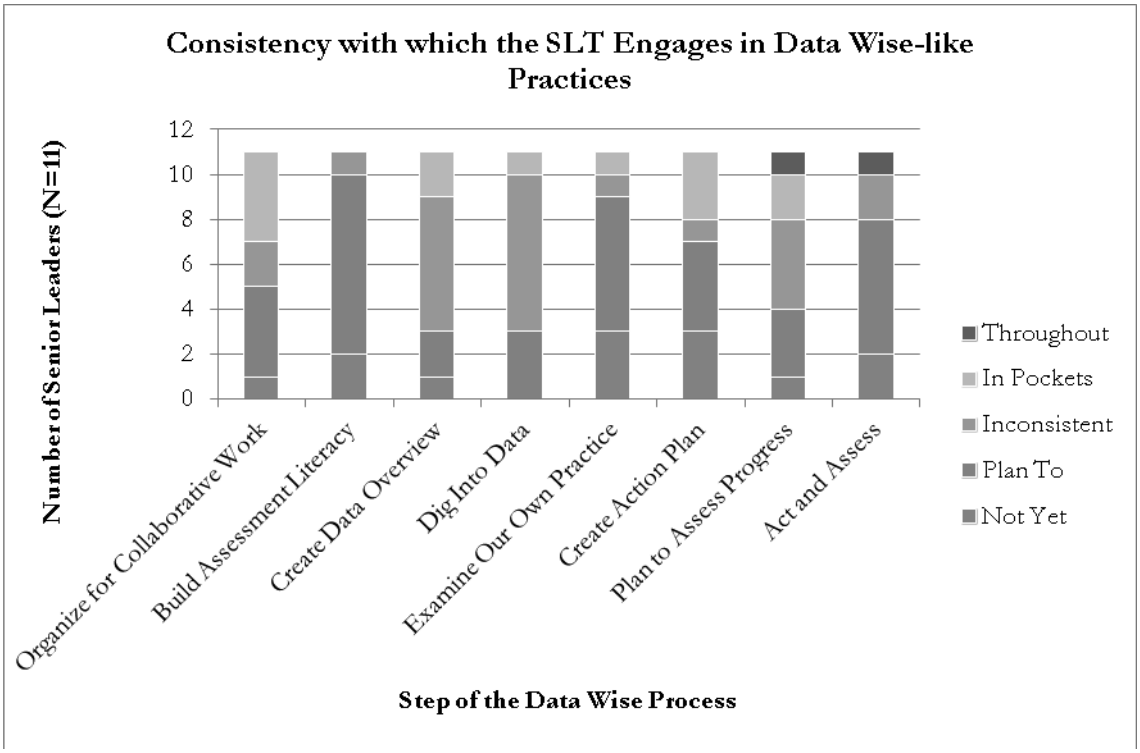
Feeling knowledgeable and openly communicating about what it takes to accomplish team goals has been considered vital to shared accountability (Wagner et al., 2006). Improvement in the structures for communication turned out not to be the same as using those structures. Senior leaders experienced this dysfunction, with 12/16 believing that avoidance of accountability resulting from low standards and not pushing each other to take responsibility was the area most in need of addressing on the SLT (as shown in Table 4) (Lencioni, 2002).

Work Stream 3: Integrating a Disciplined, Systematic Process to Reflect on Practice

Developing comfort with Data Wise. In a portfolio model it would be unusual for all the team members to use the same processes. The SLT made a significant step forward when the team committed to using the DWIP (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2013). Most senior leaders (11/15) felt comfortable with basic DWIP steps by the end of this project, but fewer than half of them felt they had a deeper understanding of the key tasks.

When this project began, I tried to determine if they were using any Data Wise–like practices. In the baseline survey, I asked senior leaders to identify the extent to which their current team participated in any practices that resembled those of Data Wise. Figure 9 shows how 11 of a possible 17 respondents answered:

Figure 9: Baseline Survey Results about Use of Data Wise–Like Practices



Notably, less than 50% of the team believed they were already practicing building assessment literacy, examining their own practice, creating action plans, and acting and assessing.

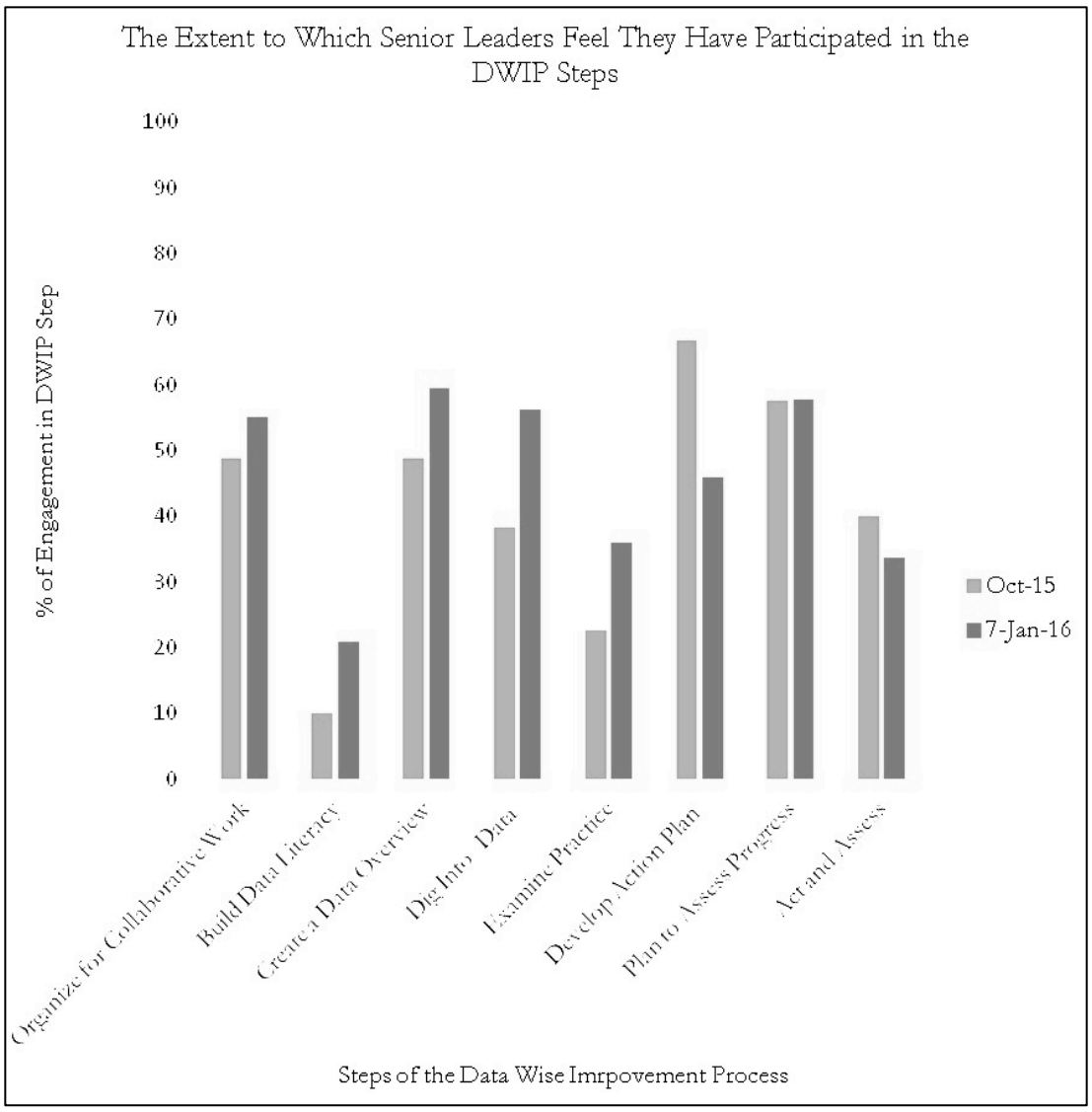
Utilizing the Data Wise Improvement Process. The first half of this strategic project saw some significant changes in the use of DWIP. The language of the baseline survey question lacked clarity. The phrases "Inconsistent" and "In Pockets" are not clearly distinguishable and left open for interpretation whether the senior leaders meant those as positive or negative impressions on DWIP implementation.

By the end of October, there was some increase in each of the preparation steps 1-3, with the largest increase being a nearly 31% jump in creating a data overview (see Appendix 7). While there was no real movement in building assessment literacy, the team was consistently looking at data in each meeting as a practice and had someone walk the members through what they were seeing. In the inquiry phase there was also positive change

in each step of the DWIP. The largest shift overall, and in this phase of DWIP, was a 38.7% increase in senior leaders' perceptions of creating action plans. In addition, there was a 12.9% increase in the percentage of senior leaders saying they experienced more deliberate attention to examining their own practice. Finally, in the acting phase, there was positive movement in both of the DWIP steps, including a 30.9% increase in the eighth step of acting and assessing their work.

When observing these changes in DWIP usage through the ACE habits of mind, there are more patterns. The SLT made the most progress in digging into data, examining practice, and creating a data overview. The group saw significant negative progress in developing action plans and some negative growth in terms of acting and assessing—both part of the first habit of mind **A**ct, assess, and adjust. The number of people who experienced a focus on **E**vidence doubled, as shown in the building data literacy step, and there was a slight increase in commitment to **C**ollaboration seen in Step 1. Figure 10 shows how SLT members felt they engaged with DWIP in October and January.

Figure 10: October and January Self-Evaluations on Data Wise Improvement Process Steps



These numbers showed significant gains in senior leaders' experiences, but when I spoke to them individually about DWIP, their assessments differed. In the private conversations, I found that most had experienced using DWIP at some point, but they did not see it as a consistent and integrated practice (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Senior Leaders' Descriptions of Their Impressions of Using Data Wise in the Senior Leadership Team

Description	Number of Senior Leaders (n = 15)
SLT use is not systematic.	7
SLT should use Data Wise more.	3
SLT is not using Data Wise.	1
SLT work is anchored in Data Wise.	1
SLT connection to Data Wise is unclear.	1

Suggestive Evidence of Becoming a Higher -functioning Senior Leadership Team

The anticipated outcome of this project was that the SLT would become a higher-functioning team. This was indeed evidenced by data suggesting that by the end of the project, they were articulating a shared purpose, identifying interdependencies, and displaying nimbleness in efforts to implement the new strategic plan.

Articulating a shared purpose for the senior leadership team. Throughout this project the SLT members identified multiple purposes. The superintendent always intended for the team to show multiple purposes, so I expected this data. Throughout the project, there was a shift in the purposes that the senior leaders articulated. At the beginning, the senior leaders recognized the purposes outlined by the superintendent, but only 5/17 leaders (29%) were confident or somewhat confident that these purposes would have positive outcomes for students. By the end of the project, there were shifts in the stated purposes and in confidence level. Although the purposes had shifted some, now 10/15 leaders (67%) were confident or somewhat confident that a positive impact on students would result. The top three purposes remained the same, though to different extents, and these aligned with the goals of the superintendent and this strategic project. Figure 12 compares the purposes

identified at the beginning of the project with those identified at the end of this segment of work.

Figure 12: Senior Leadership Team's Identified Purposes

Identified Purposes at Beginning of Project

Purpose	Number of SLT Members (n = 15)
Implementing the strategic operating plan	10
Knowing schools well	9
Improving communication/alignment	7
Teaming	2
Sharing learning	2
Knowing instruction well	1
Developing action plans	1
Wasting time/maintaining status quo	1

Identified Purposes at End of Project

Purpose	Number of SLT Members (n = 15)
Improving communication/alignment	8
Implement the strategic operating plan	6
Knowing schools well	4
Developing budget	3
Teaming	2
Wasting time maintaining status quo	1
Building leadership capacity	1
Developing cultural competency	1

Identifying interdependencies in senior leadership team work. The second intended outcome of this project was that senior leaders would identify more interdependencies in their collective work. At the start, there were pockets of support and even an example in Senior Leader 12, who did not identify being able to get help from any other senior leader as an outcome. Through this project, 9/15 senior leaders identified ways in which participation in the SLT connected their work more deeply to that of others. In addition, SLT members quantified this change, with all except for three senior leaders identifying a new thought partner since the launch of the team.

Figure 13 shows the connections between senior leaders. The first image reflects their original connections (denoted with an "X" on the network map); the second image reflects both their initial connections and their new connections (represented by an "N").

Figure 13: Senior Leaders' Network Maps

Network Map at Beginning of Project

		Incoming Connections																	
Outgoing Connections	**Leader**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**	**18**
	1					X					X								
	2																		
	3									X									
	4					X					X					X			
	5	X	X		X			X			X								
	6				X	X						X			X				
	7		X	X		X				X									
	8						X												
	9								X										
	10	X	X			X	X						X						
	11				X	X	X												
	12																		
	13										X				X	X	X		
	14						X				X					X	X		
	15				X						X	X		X	X				X
	16										X			X					
	17		X	X		X	X		X										X
	18										X								

Senior Leaders' Network Map at End of Project

		Incoming Connections																	
Outgoing Connections	**Leader**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**	**18**
	1					X					X			N	N				
	2																		
	3				N					X									
	4			N			N			N	X					X			
	5	X		N				X			X								N
	6				X	X						X			X				
	7				N	X													
	8					N	X				N	N							
	9										N	N							
	10				N	X	X												
	11				X	X	X												
	12			N											N				
	13	N				N					X				X	X	X		
	14						X				X		N			X	X		
	15				X		N				X	X		X	X				X
	16										X			X					
	17		X	X		X	X		X										X
	18														N				

These connections also surfaced in how SLT members felt about their work. At the project's close, 10 leaders (71%) recognized the team as making real-time progress on at least one aspect of implementing the SOP, whereas 4 did not see that progress. This was an increase from the start of the project, when less than 50% noticed real-time progress. This was a difference of 20%.

Displaying nimbleness. The third intended outcome of this project was for senior leaders to display nimbleness in their work. The SLT pivoted several times during the project. When the team worked collaboratively, these corrections took place more quickly. When asked about the midcourse corrections the SLT needed, several senior leaders identified moments when changes were necessary, and there were only two individual

instances of senior leaders believing a correction should have been made and was not (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Moments When the Senior Leadership Team Needed to Change Course

SLT Actually Changed Course	SLT Needed to Change Course But Did Not
• Narrowing the focus of SLT work (5) • Including the assistant superintendents on SLT (3) • Changing the structure of monitoring (3) • Using SLT work to inform offline work (2) • Hearing from those close to the work	• Too much focus on cultural competency and race talk • Delineate when team is learning and when team is deciding

I emphasized the narrowing of the SLT focus and changing the monitoring structure because these shifts directly link to improving mechanisms for communication and took place in response to feedback provided by SLT members.

Additional evidence of SLT members' nimbleness was that their feedback changed throughout the project. The areas of opportunity for change identified at the start were not the same at the end of the project. To start, the biggest frustration people expressed about the team was that the decision-making was too slow and the focus area was too broad. However, with more than half the team recognizing changes to at least one of those aspects, the new areas of opportunity were more about the follow-through and accountability of the SLT, as well as delineating when the team was acting in different capacities, such as a learning team, decision-making team, or implementation team.

Analysis of the Strategic Project

> Framing is a crucial leadership action of enrolling people in any substantial behavior change. It is especially important for promoting teaming and learning. Framing helps people interpret the ambiguous signals that accompany change in a positive and productive light and facilitates understanding of new performance expectations. (Edmondson, 2012a, p. 83)

The new SLT worked to bring the two core strategies of the SOP alive: put students at the center of their learning and develop leaders to lead for learning. For this project, I focused on developing senior leaders to lead for learning. Cultivating Equity and Excellence 2020 described the strategy of developing leaders in three ways (Figure 15). I further narrowed my focus to adult learning and the disciplined use of data and teams.

Figure 15: Key Tools for Developing Leaders to Lead for Learning

Senior leaders often create the environment for others to change values, adjust behaviors, and improve practice by modeling that work themselves. I prioritized adult learning for those leaders, and I attempted to increase their functionality by building a team and using data in a disciplined way.

I combined several views of learning to develop my working definition. In organizational theory, learning is the ability to increase the organization's capacity to reach its aspirational goals (Senge, 2006). In change theory, learning is the behavior exhibited when leaders join in acquiring knowledge, building collaboration, and responding to feedback (Wagner et al., 2006). And in teaming theory, individual and collective learning are the

process of taking action, assessing its impact, and adjusting as necessary to meet desired objectives (Edmondson, 2012a). So in this capstone, *learning* refers to increasing people's abilities to develop and refine their individual skills and work collectively to adjust and make more effective choices in service of helping HPS reach the aspirational goals of its SOP.

I began this project with three key levers in mind. First, adults would have to prioritize learning for themselves, just as they focus on students' learning; this could unlock the potential in HPS's existing human capital. Second, research suggests that many organizations have effectively activated learning through collaborative inquiry, so the disciplined use of data is important. Third, the SOP calls for supporting leaders and teams; therefore, improving the SLT's functioning might allow for the new framing and learning orientation of the SOP to shine. Thus, the following theory of action guided my work:

> **If I create the conditions to develop stronger relationships between senior leaders, provide mechanisms to strengthen communication within the SLT, and integrate a disciplined and systemic process to reflect on practice, then the SLT will become a higher-functioning team, as evidenced by articulating a shared vision and purpose for the team, identifying more interdependencies in their work, and increasing their nimbleness in making more intentional adjustments as they implement the current SOP.**

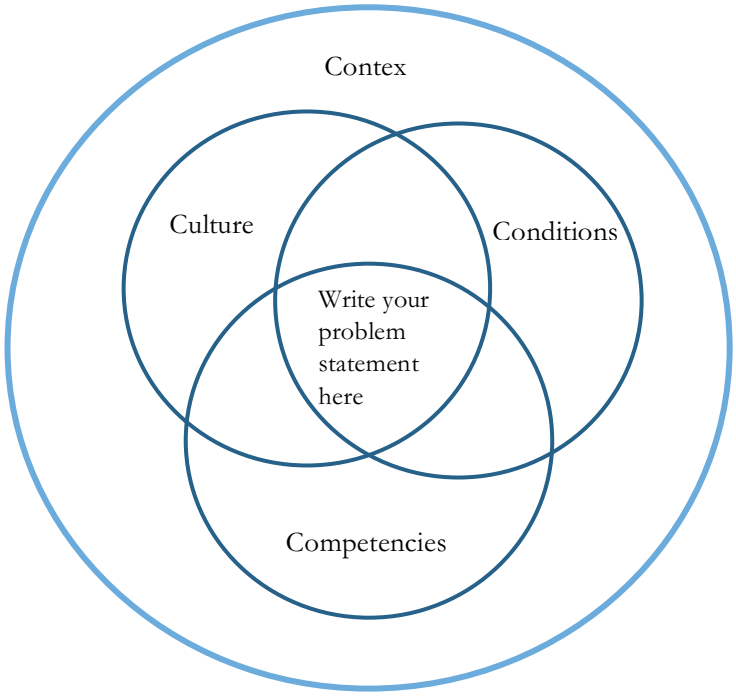
To explain my work and how this strategic project unfolded in HPS, I paired Wagner and colleagues' 4 C's of Change (4 C's) framework with the concepts spelled out in my RKA. At the start, I anticipated my work would revolve mostly around the formation of the SLT, so I focused on the ideas of fostering togetherness. As the project progressed, I became more certain that this work was about understanding and shifting the mind-sets of the senior leaders themselves. They needed to see a connection between how they participated in or experienced the SLT and the improvements they sought for the district as a whole. As with the complex issues at play in district transformation, the key to explaining the work of this project lay at the intersection of ideas. The 4 C's framework allowed me to understand the

issue of developing a higher-functioning SLT from multiple perspectives and ensure that I attended to the contextual factors in HPS.

The 4 C's of Change Framework: Competencies, Conditions, Culture, and Context

The 4 C's of Change framework is based on the overlap of the competencies, conditions, and culture of an organization in a unique context (Wagner et al., 2006). The 4 C's framework has often been used to address changes at the school level, but it has also been applied to organizations because the same fundamental elements underlie change in both. Figure 16 shows a basic model of the framework.

Figure 16: 4 C's of Change Framework



SOURCE: T. Wagner, et al. (2006). *Change leadership: A practical guide to transforming our schools.* 1st ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

The first step for my strategic project was to understand the people I worked with and their competencies in order to form a high-functioning SLT. According to the 4 C's framework, **competencies** are "the repertoire of skills and knowledge that influences

student learning" (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 99). Every senior leader I worked with already had impressive personal capabilities, but I knew that competencies could be changed through targeted professional learning and collaboration.

I began with their competencies as the entry point because I saw a technical path forward. A technical problem is one whose solution is known; leaders simply need to get better at executing an intervention (Heifetz, 2009). I decided to build competency by identifying DWIP as a systemic, reflective process and teaching it. Research suggests that skill building and professional learning are effective ways to increase competency (Edmondson, 2012a).

The next entry point—also a technical one—centered on the conditions of the environment in which we would try to improve the functioning of the SLT. According to the 4C's of Change framework, **conditions** are the tangible arrangements of time, space, and resources (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 101). I worked directly with the superintendent and her chief of staff; so managing the conditions for this project remained within my ability to influence, though not always within my ability to control. I tried to increase the time dedicated to project activities and the structures for communicating the urgency of becoming a higher-functioning team.

The culture developed from people's experiences with the created conditions. While aspects of culture can be visible, there are often deep-rooted layers that have become ingrained over time (Duhigg, 2016). According to the 4 C's framework, **culture** is "the shared values, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and behaviors related to students and learning, teachers and teaching, instructional leadership, and the quality of relationships within and beyond the school" (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 102). Culture combines habits and

rituals that team members expect and experience, so shifting culture presented itself as an adaptive problem rather than a technical matter.

An adaptive issue is one whose solution is unknown; addressing an adaptive problem requires new ways of thinking and being (Heifetz, 2009). Because culture centers on people's mind-sets, it has the potential to be the most influential lever for change in an adaptive context. Even if every team member is competent and all the conditions are aligned to promote change, the team's culture could still single-handedly stave off improvement if the team did not take advantage of the changes. So understanding and building on the developing culture became the focus of my work in HPS.

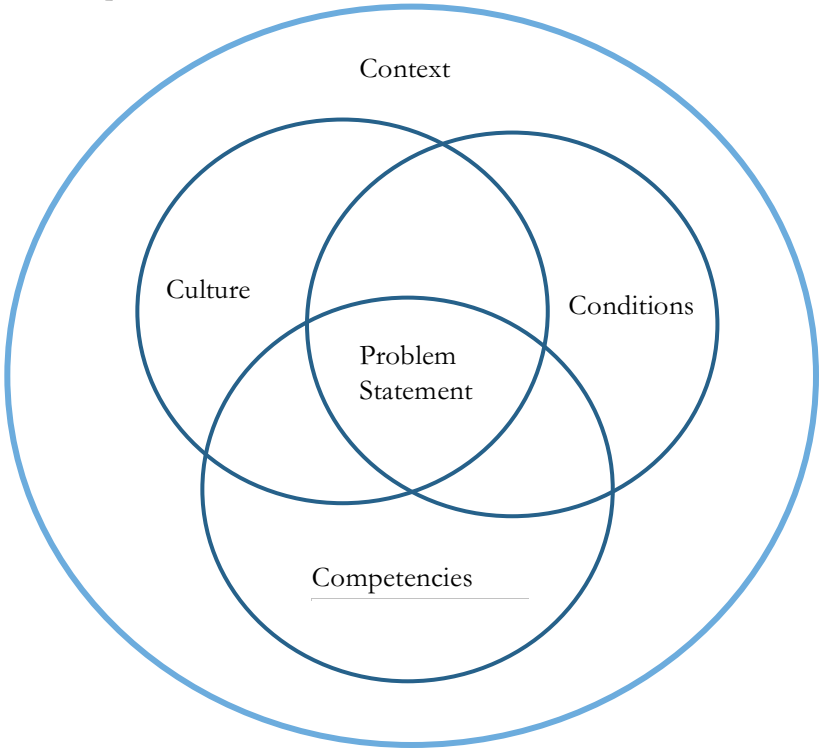
The culture of this SLT was powerful. It was intentionally developed in response to the conditions and the context in which people anxiously awaited change. According to the 4 C's, **context** consists of the "'skill demands' all students must meet to succeed as providers, learners, and citizens and the particular aspirations, needs, and concerns of the families and community that the school or district serves" (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 104). In HPS, both internal and external contexts influenced the SLT.

From the beginning, I recognized four key aspects of context as powerful. First, Dr. Narvaez was a relatively new superintendent leading a brand-new SLT. Second, HPS had just unveiled its new SOP. Third, HPS was moving to the second level of portfolio management work by recentralizing some decisions at the district level. Fourth, the political landscape in Hartford was changing. Former mayor and board of education member, Pedro Segarra, was in a fight for reelection, which increased uncertainty because in Hartford the mayor appoints a majority of school board members. So I took the context as given and designed interventions to move the other three parts of the 4 C's framework, but the impact of context on those dimensions could not be ignored.

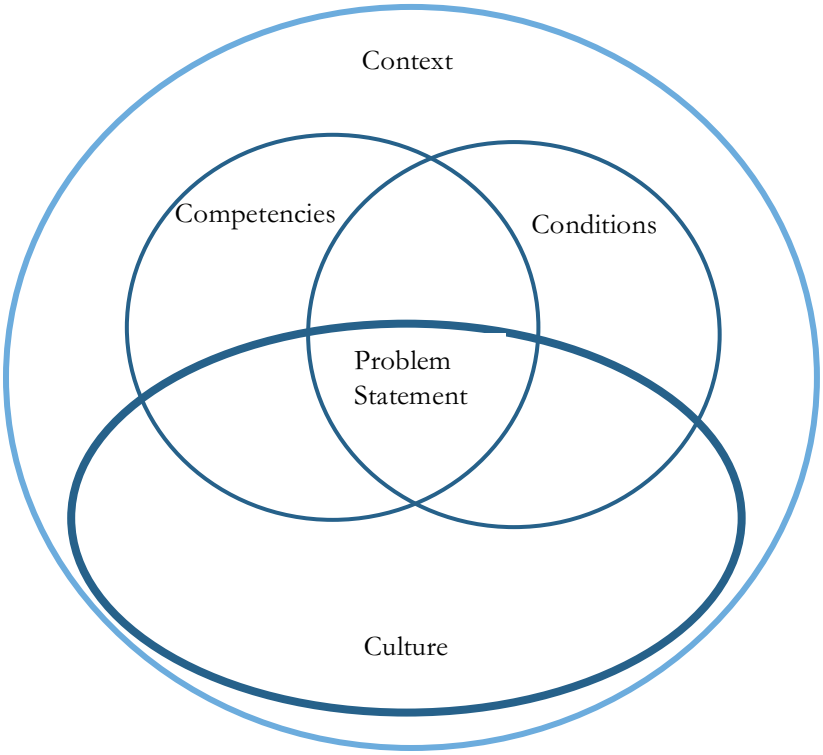
Using the 4 C's framework, I next explore what happened when HPS senior leaders came together to form one SLT. I expected that the three inner components of the framework held equal weight, so I attempted to address each facet simultaneously and with equal attention. I came to realize that, in the HPS context, the impact or weight of each component differed from that of the model, and so did the interactions between components. In this analysis I examine the progression of my thinking and try to make sense of the movement, successes, and opportunities for change by comparing the *anticipated* results to the *actual* results I experienced (Figure 17).

Figure 17: My Anticipated and Experienced Interactions with the 4 C's Framework

Anticipated Interaction of the 4 C's Framework



Experienced Interaction of the 4 C's Framework



SOURCE: Adapted from T. Wagner, et al. (2006). *Change leadership: A practical guide to transforming our schools.* 1st ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Analyzing the Interventions from My Theory of Action

In trying to develop a higher-functioning SLT, I designed my project interventions along three dimensions, assuming the context as a given. I created conditions to develop relationships, saw opportunities to strengthen communication, and integrated a systemic process that allowed senior leaders to reflect on their practice. In Figure 18, I show how each aspect of my project aligns with the 4 C's of Change framework.

Figure 18: Strategic Project Interventions in the Context of the 4 C's of Change

	Context	Competencies	Conditions	Culture
Developed relationships				X
Strengthened communication			X	
Integrated reflective practice		X		

Strengthening mechanisms for communication to affect conditions on the senior leadership team. Several researchers suggest that consistent, thoughtful communication helps teams thrive (Edmondson et al., 2001; Kotter, 2012; Senge, 2006). My operational definition of communication was the intentional passing of clear, consistent, and relevant messages from one person or group to another. This includes both the transferring of information and giving and receiving feedback. Of all the framework components, the SLT made the most progress in strengthening systems for communication within the team.

Leveraging meeting structures to change conditions. I approached the task of strengthening the mechanisms for communication in the most technical sense. Using both formal and informal authority, I helped the SLT create several new structures to increase the time and the space for communicating with each other. The SLT built on its practice of ending each meeting with key messages, and I helped incorporate structures such as

additions to the agenda and offline meeting structures to follow up on previous action items from meeting to meeting. Senior leaders continued improving conditions by creating two additional meeting structures to boost collaboration time. This suggests the communication and meeting structures were useful for communicating consistently about schools and implementation decisions.

Leveraging feedback structures to change conditions. Collecting feedback was another important form of communication that took hold with the SLT. I defined feedback as information that goes into a system and the meaning-making and learning that happen as a result (Berger, 2012, p. 148). Research suggests that receiving and synthesizing feedback to make changes in practice is one effective way of learning (Edmondson, 2012a).

Learning often results from processing mistakes or mishaps and discussing how to do things differently (Kerman et al., 2012). In such cases, when it can be difficult to assimilate feedback, adequate time for communication is important to ensure that the team has a shared understanding of what the events meant. Increasing mechanisms for communication allows for the learning from feedback to happen around an event or action and not at the expense of any person on the team (Bryk, 2015). In HPS, collecting feedback also meant I learned what was working for the SLT in order to continue those effective practices.

Creating the conditions for learning from feedback. Research also shows communication is fundamental to building relational trust and psychological safety for learning within teams and organizations (Edmondson et al., 2001). Gathering feedback from all the senior leaders was important here because it created a model in which to consider multiple perspectives and the superintendent was not seen as the source of all answers. To promote a culture of adult development and change within the team, feedback from other

team members gave senior leaders the opportunity to question their major assumptions and the certainty with which they made planning decisions (Kegan & Lahey, 2001).

My work with the SLT resulted in a consistent practice of using a feedback protocol at the end of meetings. Often, I tailored and repurposed time based on their feedback in order to make meetings more useful for senior leaders. They often provided high-quality feedback, and I then identified themes to address in upcoming meetings. This dialogue (the interaction between their feedback and my planning) was an essential component of changing practice and learning for the team and for me (Honig, 2008). Unfortunately, feedback sessions were sometimes shortened or skipped due to time constraints.

Additionally, while feedback was often listened to, this did not necessarily mean people always preferred the new direction that such feedback suggested. This point connected the work of strengthening communication with the work of being reflective about practice because it elevated one of the Data Wise habits of mind: a commitment to act, assess, and adjust (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2013). Therefore, the feedback cycle became a continuous form of communication that ultimately changed the culture of the team, helping them to be more reflective about understanding issues facing the team, searching for different problem-solving strategies, and reevaluating their work priorities (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 110).

New systems and structures did dramatically change the conditions for communication for the HPS SLT, but they remained insufficient to overcome the SLT's beliefs and culture. Most senior leaders still felt out of the loop in terms of receiving information. I knew this because SLT members had not yet begun using the new structures consistently and without prompting. Although the conditions for communication improved,

the added structures and systems did not support learning as I had anticipated. I represent this in Figure 17 as a larger overlap area between conditions and culture.

Conditions of communication leading to a culture of collaboration. The reason I began by strengthening communication is that intentional communication is an important component of collaboration (Edmondson et al., 2001). Effective communication enables leaders to learn to work together (Wageman, 2008). I worked to make communication become as much about sharing information as about collaboratively co-creating the work and using the systems that allowed all 17 of the senior leaders to be heard.

The practice of co-creation was not consistent in the SLT at the beginning of this project, which became apparent as I helped SLT members prepare to share implementation plans. When the focus shifted to the format of the provided implementation plan template rather than the content of the work, I saw that some district leaders were unaccustomed to getting feedback from peers about their work. I had difficulty getting some to complete their implementation plans even after offering to sit with them individually; they expressed doubt about the value of sharing their practice with others.

These implementation plans became one of the first exercises in commitment to communication and feedback about each other's work. That experience opened the door, with one senior leader remarking, "This is the first time I feel I have gotten real and helpful feedback from my colleagues about work that they are not directly connected to. It was so powerful, I used it with my own team" (Senior Leader 1, 9/28/15). Such reactions prompted some positive shifts regarding the value proposition of soliciting feedback from each other.

Still, the ideas of giving feedback and encouraging healthy conflict to improve work products never took hold the way I anticipated because the SLT stayed more at the transactional level as opposed to the creation level of communicating information

(Edmondson, 2012a). This meant the senior leaders shared some information but did not consistently construct new or more nuanced meaning together. "Indeed, virtually every other profession in modern life has transitioned to various forms of teamwork, yet most educators still work alone" (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 72). In order to achieve collaboration, the team must have an atmosphere of trust and psychological safety, which relies more on a culture of relational trust between members than on continuing to work alone (Edmondson, 1998). A lack of productive conflict demonstrates a culture that needs to develop stronger relationships, so that culture can grow in importance (Lencioni, 2002).

Creating conditions for building relationships to change culture on the senior leadership team. I also attempted to change the culture of the team by creating the conditions needed to build relationships. "Relationships refers to the quality of attitudes, feelings, and behaviors of various individuals and groups towards one another as they engage in the work of helping all students learn" (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 135). Although the SLT created several conditions and built more connections, they had yet to display the depth of relationship I had hoped for. Why didn't the conditions lead to the intended outcome? The opportunities to build relationships felt inauthentic, so they did not move the culture of the team the way I had anticipated.

Building relationships through shared learning experiences to change culture on the senior leadership team. Research suggests that shared learning is a way to get to know others' perspectives and, ultimately, to strengthen and empower the team (Bryk, 2015; Kegan et al., 2014; Kotter, 2006; Kouzes, 2012). In planning for SLT meetings, I relied heavily on this strategy, and I believed shared learning offered authentic opportunities to build relationships.

Learning by doing and learning together are qualities of high-functioning teams, but I struggled to find sufficient time for the SLT to do this well (Senge, 2006). Throughout this project I was able to construct only three shared learning opportunities based on texts. In meetings this time was often replaced or cut short to address more urgent matters. The limited instances and continual supplanting of these opportunities led some senior leaders to question members' commitment to building relationships within the team.

The depth of the shared learning experiences was also not ideal. Because I had envisioned more time and opportunities to engage, these first meetings stayed on the level of checking for understanding and agreeing on common language, which made SLT members impatient. They saw the discussions as "getting along" and did not see the connection between building relationships at the SLT level and achieving the immediate changes they wanted to see at the school and classroom level (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 68). Team members could not see that continuing current actions had not yet produced their desired outcomes either. Their attitude about spending time—one of their most valued commodities—on building relationships was an aspect of the culture that did not substantially shift.

Building relationships using discrete team-building activities to change culture on the senior leadership team. To create authentic relationships required certain conditions and time, and people had to be willing to be vulnerable and share in the building. The conditions and time were established to engage in certain discrete team-building activities, such as getting-to-know-you games, identifying work-style preferences, and the sharing of favorite movies. Setting aside time to intentionally organize for collaborative work and get to know one another is also considered preparation to collaborate effectively (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2013). However, several senior leaders did not appreciate these activities and chose not to participate fully in the exercises.

The intention was for these discrete relationship-building activities to build a community culture that was passionate, focused, and committed to the same goals, but the SLT never progressed beyond getting to know one another. I knew this because during my private interviews many SLT members admitted that although they engaged, they withheld parts of themselves during those experiences. Almost every team member recognized that he or she held back from sharing with the team. More than half admitted they regularly withheld their views, which led to a false sense of harmony. Lack of conflict is not a sign of authentic relationship building (Lencioni, 2002). The majority of people engaged on some level, but the active and passive detractors showed up in the survey data as experiencing a lack of trust on the team and limited buy-in to the process.

The interaction of team culture and competencies in the work of the senior leadership team. Low levels of trust, few authentic relationships, and limited shared learning are associated with a culture of poor psychological safety (Edmondson, 1998). When team members do not feel psychologically safe, fear of judgment can keep them from experimenting and learning from their failures (Edmondson et al., 2001). Limited psychological safety can also mean senior leaders fear taking appropriate risks because failing might be held against them(Edmondson, 2012a). In HPS, SLT had not yet organized to learn from one another because they needed more psychological safety.

With a culture of limited psychological safety, the team lacked a strong holding environment due to stifled communication and lack of relational trust, and so it was difficult for them to express opinions that might be challenged (Heifetz, 2002). A holding environment is defined as "all those ties that bind people together and enable them to maintain their collective focus on what they are trying to do" (Heifetz, 2009, p. 155). At HPS, the challenging adaptive work was to organize the SLT so as to implement the new

strategic plan most effectively. Research would suggest that the SLT could build momentum by engaging with each other and collaborating to foster learning and instructional leadership (Wagner et al., 2006). In an effort to create a stronger holding environment for this learning to take place and to build psychological safety, I attempted to increase competencies by using a collaborative inquiry process designed to help team members reflect on their practice.

Integrating a systemic reflective process to increase competencies on the senior leadership team. My third intervention was to integrate a systemic process for senior leaders to reflect on their practice. Here, I integrated DWIP into the formation of the SLT. In the 4 C's of Change framework, data are used as a lever to uncover challenges and illuminate progress in making change (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 135). I saw this collaborative inquiry process as a way of bringing various perspectives and ideas together because DWIP uses a relentless focus on data and evidence to complete a cycle of preparation, inquiry, and action to promote change. The SLT was preparing to collaborate by building relationships and strengthening their communication. DWIP presented a clear and evidence-based opportunity to explore, experiment, and learn together.

Developing skills with the Data Wise Improvement Process to promote change. SLT members built some competency with DWIP because it was a consistent frame for team conversations. The senior leaders had exposure to the process and had internalized the broad concepts and language, but they did not exhibit significant facility with applying DWIP to their own practice or have a clear understanding of the key tasks in each step. So while the language of DWIP was prevalent, the practice was less so.

The most significant step the SLT took was to adopt a single improvement process. DWIP gave them an opportunity to bring some alignment to how senior leaders addressed

systemic issues in the context of a portfolio model. The process required them to look at the same data, explore various causes, and agree on a collective action plan to change practice in their efforts to implement the SOP well. DWIP was the correct choice of a collaborative process because of the three major phases: prepare, inquire, and act (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2013). Since the team had formed to organize for collaborative work, and inquiry has been used to disarm groups and help them understand others' perspectives better, DWIP presented a direct attempt to do some competency building in order to facilitate coherent and collective action (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2013; Garvin, Edmondson, & Gino, 2008).

Uses of Data Wise that affected the competency of senior leadership teamwork. Senior leaders made progress in using collaborative inquiry on several fronts. They consistently looked at data and were open to sharing data that reflected varying levels of success. While I still needed to change the conditions to provide adequate time allotments for looking at data, people got excited about this work. Also, momentum was building since the team had clearly identified an improvement process. Several SLT members expressed excitement about feeling anchored in a consistent way of doing things as an SLT. This was a relatively new prospect in the context of HPS as a portfolio system. I noticed tension between what should be tightly controlled and what should be loosely bound in terms of setting direction, so it was a success when the SLT bought into DWIP.

Despite positive progress on using the process, the SLT was not as reflective on their practice as DWIP intends. Instead of examining their own practice, the SLT still predominantly focused on what happened in schools. They did not do enough inquiry into the practice of their work together as a team. This was because data were less clear and less

available about senior leaders' practices. Since Data Wise is intended as a reflective tool, implementation of DWIP faltered somewhat.

The impact of my leadership on increasing the senior leadership team's competency with using Data Wise. Implementing DWIP with fidelity depended heavily on my competency to facilitate the learning during SLT meetings, and I was not as effective as I could have been for three major reasons. First, I did not protect adequate time to teach the process or to move the SLT through a complete cycle. Second, I noticed that senior leaders regularly used only the generic language of the steps, and I did little work in teaching the depth of the key tasks in the process. I was so excited that the SLT had adopted a single process that did not push for them to be precise in following each key task. Third, I neither pushed them to keep their own practice at the center of the inquiry nor insisted on following the DWIP habits of mind, particularly relentlessly focusing on evidence in conversation (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2013). While I did not lead the work tightly during SLT meetings, I did work with several senior leaders outside that space to implement DWIP more effectively.

I recognized I did not frame the integration of DWIP into SLT practice in a way that set the conditions to flourish. I did not frame the important learning because the SLT never actually saw the process in action. I never tried to facilitate a quick cycle to develop their ease with the process. We did not consistently approach the work focused on data as inquiry and learning instead of monitoring. This learning orientation could have allowed people to experiment and reflect on the usefulness of the process (Edmondson, 2012a). As long as the framing was monitoring, which is based on accountability, DWIP as a process did not align well as a lever for change because individual efforts and work were considered more than the collective work of the team. Collaborative inquiry did not lend itself to a hierarchical

accountability culture because it is about developing a deeper understanding of why something can happen in addition to showing actual results (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2013).

Additionally, I tried to use DWIP across too broad a spectrum of work. Because the purpose of inquiry lacked precision, the SLT did not focus attention on their own work. I left the data inquiry open to focusing on schools' results instead of narrowing in on their own practice. In addition, the breadth of work meant it was difficult to identify specific behaviors that were related to outcomes, so senior leaders did not build the skills or become comfortable with the process of interrogating their own practice. My focus on consistent basic exposure to and integration of language turned out not to be the highest leverage in retrospect because the data we used did not focus on SLT work.

Beyond the attention to language exposure, I questioned my decision to focus on collaborative inquiry as an intervention at the launch of the SLT. I made this choice because one of the senior leaders' favorite activities was to share problems of practice with others and develop solutions. The setting seemed ripe and ready to fit this practice. I recognized that a process like Data Wise offered a way for SLT members to track their solutions and then revisit them to assess whether those solutions were having the desired impact.

I also intended for this project to create the conditions for using data as a means of sticking with interventions that worked and letting go of those that were good in theory but did not translate well into practice. The practice of streamlining initiatives is often difficult for districts that hold onto programs long after they have proved ineffective (Evans, Thornton, & Usinger, 2012). As the SLT improved its use of a systemic process (DWIP), I saw the opportunity to change the culture of being nimble. This connection is represented by more overlap between competency and culture in Figure 17.

DWIP proved not to be as successful an intervention to accomplish the goal of reflective practice for two reasons. One, I never moved the SLT through a full cycle, through which they could assess the usefulness of an intervention. Two, the SLT did not show the capacity to select focus areas or problems of practice that highlighted interdependent work or that high enough leverage to include the entire team. The conversations during collaborative inquiry were interesting, but they did not always advance the collective work of the SLT, nor did they provide the momentum I intended.

Analyzing the Outcomes from My Theory of Action

Because I aimed to affect three dimensions of the 4C's framework, I anticipated that the SLT would become a higher-functioning team that articulated a shared vision, identified interdependencies, and displayed nimbleness. I anticipated these impacts based on Wageman (2008), Edmondson (2012), and Lencioni's (2002) research of building strong teams and creating the supportive environment to focus on learning and change. While none of the outputs was expected to address all 4 C's, I did notice an unexpected impact on the fourth C, context, which I had taken as given. Figure 19 shows how each output related to the 4 C's.

Figure 19: Strategic Project Outcomes in the Context of the 4 C's of Change

	Context	**Competencies**	**Conditions**	**Culture**
The SLT will be a higher-functioning team that…				
Articulates a shared vision	X		X	X
Identifies interdependencies	X		X	X
Displays nimbleness		X		X

The senior leadership team's shared vision. Research suggests the SLT might be more effective if they could articulate a shared vision as they lead change (Senge, 2006). Shared vision gets people on the same page about their work. To fulfill their purpose, teams must understand why they were formed and what their intended focus is (Wageman, 2008). Senior leaders also need to rely on a shared vision to communicate beyond the team and obtain buy-in for the changes they want to promote (Kotter, 2006).

The conditions for developing shared vision to promote change in Hartford Public Schools. The SLT had more clarity and consistency of purpose at its formation than it did at the end of the project. During the SLT launch retreat, I set up the conditions to spend time addressing why this team was necessary. At launch, the purpose was to build an SLT that could implement the new strategic plan well. This commitment to build a new SLT felt both powerful and high leverage to senior leaders. I noted progress here because one month into the project most senior leaders held at least two purposes in common: building a team and implementing the SOP. The retreat was an opportunity to build and communicate those two purposes collectively.

Their articulation of shared vision shifted throughout the project. Toward the end, there was less agreement on purpose because they felt they were already focused on becoming a team (this addressed one of their initial shared purposes). In addition, the SLT iterated their process for monitoring the SOP four times in six months based on systematic feedback cycles, so senior leaders sensed progress there as well.

As the superintendent and I shifted the conditions to create space for meeting more regularly and opening lines of communication, members started building relationships, but the superintendent nor I ever discussed the next level of vision and purpose for the team. Overlooking this aspect of the work exposed an obstacle we had created for ourselves and

the team in terms of sharing vision (Wagner et al., 2006). As we moved from team formation as a purpose in and of itself, the direction became less compelling to people and more varied in interpretation. The vision, purpose, and functions of the team became intertwined without targeted attention and sufficient leadership.

The importance of shared vision to promote change in the context of Hartford Public Schools. A critical aspect of team development is understanding and clearly articulating the team's work through a shared vision (Edmondson, 2012a; Senge, 2006). This compelling direction might also protect SLT members because it could provide guidance to make their interactions more consistent outside of the SLT. The vision needed to go beyond catchy slogans from the SOP and individual contributions of members in order to be meaningful to all (Kegan, 2016). Team members needed to see themselves in the work and to understand how building a collective could allow them to be more effective than working alone. Articulating a shared purpose and urgency around meeting that purpose was fundamental for change (Kotter, 2006).

With an always-moving political context, it was difficult to know what immediate results the superintendent would need to produce, so there was pressure to produce more and, unintentionally, to learn less (Bolman, 2008). The expected outcome of articulating a shared vision dissipated over time because without regrouping as a team, senior leaders started to pursue their own purposes and interests more aggressively particularly given the shifting political landscape.

The impact of sharing or not sharing vision on the culture of the senior leadership team. The focus on the political context affected team culture and blurred the line between what was happening within the SLT and what was a result of the external context. Figure 17 displays this as the boundary of the culture and context shifting closer

together in my experience of the 4 C's. Though it was often unstated in the larger group, the culture of SLT remained less collaborative with less shared responsibility than the superintendent or I desired. This left open the potential for a lack of commitment to SLT goals, which meant the SLT maintained an accountability culture in response to what was happening within the district and beyond it (Lencioni, 2002). Keeping the focus on building shared vision may have changed the culture because culture represents the unseen attitudes toward the work of the SLT. In that way, the culture became more prevalent as a potential lever because it shifted the conditions of the SLT's work. Some theorists believe that in order for people to fully invest in the work and produce top-quality outcomes, a culture of seeing themselves in the work is helpful (Berger, 2012; Kegan, 2016).

Identified interdependencies in the senior leadership team. The second intended outcome of this project was that senior leaders would identify more interdependencies in their work. Interdependent, collaborative work shows evidence of teaming because individuals strive toward a shared goal (Edmondson, 2012b). Research suggests that interdependencies also promote more efficient work because they eliminate confusion and differences in vision as organizations strive to transform (Lencioni, 2002; Honig, 2008).

The ability to identify interdependencies within the culture of the senior leadership team. The culture of accountability made identifying interdependencies more difficult. People focused on covering for themselves and protecting their own interests as opposed to promoting the interests of the group (Kegan, 2001). There was a lack of vulnerability and trust in the culture that meant people self-protected and were less forthcoming about their work. Senior leaders also noted and compared their contributions to the contributions of others (Lencioni, 2002). This led to a greater focus on individual work

than on the team's collective work. Operating in this manner put the SLT in the political frame of operating as more of a coalition than a team, meaning that leaders compared, competed, and negotiated to secure scarce resources of time, funding, and power (Bolman, 2008).

In the political frame, information and power are valuable forms of currency. The culture was such that senior leaders still tried to distinguish themselves within the group. Although people shared problems of practice and had the competencies to improve the collective work, many felt they lacked trusting relationships. This meant that, without being guided, they underutilized communication structures to see how the work connected or overlapped. At project end, interdependent work oftentimes felt forced in the larger group despite increased individual connections.

Identified interdependencies in the context of being a newly formed senior leadership team. Still, there was some improvement in identifying interdependencies; this was a positive sign for a newly forming team. As stated in the results section, most senior leaders identified ways in which their work connected to others more deeply because of working with the SLT. These new connections showed that interdependence can change in the context of a newly forming team. Research suggests that skill and competency development often precede the belief or desire to exercise those skills or to shift the culture (Berger, 2012). I came to understand that for a newly forming team, developing the ability to identify interdependencies when directly asked is an example of true improvement.

The impact of conditions set on interdependencies identified. In addition to shifts in the context of the SLT team, conditions were changed to rework and restructure how people understood their interconnected work. My project was likely to succeed in ripening the organization to understand how and why interdependent work was important than it was

at increasing actual interdependent work within the SLT. "An issue is ripe when the urgency to deal with it has become generalized across the system" (Heifetz, 2009, p. 126). At the start of this project, the ripeness for interdependent work was localized to the superintendent and a few of the senior leaders. There was no coalition pushing the urgency of the issue (Kotter, 2006; Wagner et al., 2006).

Because of the team's newness and this localization of urgency, identifying interdependencies was not likely to make much progress. The timing was not right to see dramatic improvement in this area. The methods of impact—increasing relationships and strengthening communication—were not strong enough interventions to address interdependencies at that time.

I did recognize that pushing the SLT before they were ready to identify interdependencies played an important role in promoting this issue in the future. The SLT was on track to make significant change, but the project ended before I could measure that progress. This meshes with the ideas of organizational learning in that the more willing the SLT is to work together toward the same purposes, the more successful the team would be in efforts to lead change in HPS (Senge, 2006). At the time, the superintendent demonstrated leadership strength by creating the conditions to allow the type of interdependent work she desired, and she modeled nimbleness in how to approach change. This may account for some of the progress observed.

Nimbleness in the senior leadership team. Adaptability and nimbleness are needed as part of district transformation because of unstable contexts; that is, the landscape changes faster than the organizations can (Honig et al., 2010). Throughout this project, the SLT made several necessary course corrections, which aided several change processes. The

clear leadership and focus on solving real-time issues afforded several opportunities for growth in the nimbleness of the SLT. The SLT displayed great progress here.

Changing senior leadership team conditions promoted a culture that embraced nimbleness. The senior leaders created the conditions to shift their culture by giving additional time to address the work of the SLT, and they were flexible with schedules. As people became more comfortable, there was a developing culture of providing feedback and sharing when adjustments needed to be made. SLT members became more likely to show nimbleness and react in real time both during meetings and in planning. During reflection sessions on their systemic monitoring process, senior leaders searched for new and more effective ways of approaching problems (Wagner et al., 2006); this showed a changing culture within the team. There were attempts to learn from failure and adjust in real time to address concerns of SLT members and of principals in the Acceleration Agenda. The adjustments SLT members made in their own work addressed issues of staffing, curriculum, community outreach, and collaboration time for these schools.

The readiness of senior leadership team competency and culture for nimbleness. The SLT did not fully reap the benefits of nimbleness for two major reasons. First, the context for change was unclear because the SLT's direction was not focused. Without a clear and shared articulation of the SLT's vision, it became difficult to align shifting actions in a coherent way toward a singular end (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 138). In fact, senior leaders became more nimble in advocating for or promoting their own agendas or competing commitments than in adjusting to doing the work of SLT better. Competing commitments, or those that impede progress towards the intended goal, serve to protect personal interests but can also create barriers to achieving the stated goal (Arbinger Institute, 2010; Wagner et al., 2006, p. 87).

Second, the SLT did not exploit nimbleness because it lacked vulnerability and was prone to artificial harmony. Surface-level harmony sometimes hid a lack of commitment to follow through on the decisions made during SLT meetings (Lencioni, 2002). In terms of team development, they were still building the competency of forsaking personal views and moving in a collectively determined direction—a behavior expected as new teams form. They needed to practice being committed to decisions that did not match their personal desires. Research suggests that when people's worries, fears, and competing commitments remain apparent, it is often because the culture is overly influenced by individual self-preservation (Kegan et al., 2014).. The competency and attitudes needed to enact team decisions may not be collectively shared. This was the case here.

Analysis of My Theory of Action

When looking through the lens of the 4C's of Change framework, I questioned whether or not my expected outcomes were sufficient to create a higher-functioning team. I selected interventions that were both technical (mechanisms for communication and learning a new inquiry process) and adaptive (building relationships and utilizing a new inquiry process). I approached the work in ways that turned out to be more technical (i.e., creating structures and processes) as opposed to concerning myself with team members' experiences and focusing on interventions that would influence their mind-sets and their willingness to participate on the new team. The SLT made less progress as a team because the timing and prioritization of the interventions should have been different.

Shared vision and purpose seemed appropriate and fundamental to both building a team and to fostering change because everyone needed to know where the group was headed. Clarity and focus as well as understanding the purpose behind the work was necessary for improvement and progress (Wagner et al., 2006). Compelling direction was

essential for bringing together a high-functioning SLT because it would allow each member to see themselves as one part of a larger vision (Wageman, 2008). Having a shared purpose provides an anchor for experimentation. Experimenting is critical during the formation of a new team and implementation of a new strategic plan. Greater experimentation would have created a culture where leaders saw failures as opportunities to learn and to continue pursuing shared goals, as opposed to setbacks (A. C. Edmondson, 2012).

Emphasizing the identifying of interdependencies, though it is an important competency, may have overlooked two major factors that would have helped to create a higher-functioning team. First, the SLT needed to be a real team (Wageman, 2008), meaning one in which boundaries, roles, and responsibilities are clear and people are invested. I needed to plan for adequate time to learn how to work together and leverage team member's skills effectively. The team did not build a shared commitment that teaming was an active process; coming together as a team for a while is not the same as teaming (Edmondson, 2012a). My inability to foster enough shared commitment resulted in incomplete engagement or investment in the active and continual process of teaming.

Furthermore, in order to want to share work, the team needed more psychological safety (Edmondson, 2012b). I assumed shared vision and purpose would be enough to drive increased trust among SLT members, but they were not. Senior leaders did not experience enough support from one another or the broader political context to build the strongest possible SLT. Without being a real team or having enough relational trust, people did not settle conflict and fully commit to team decisions. Instead, they held on tighter to their own work instead of opening it up to others and holding one another accountable for improving the work of the team (Lencioni, 2002).

Displaying nimbleness to adapt in real time to the myriad issues facing a SLT was not clearly defined: I never told the team that nimbleness can be more useful if it is in service of the shared purpose and vision. In addition, I had no intentional measure for that aspect of the work. The nimbleness the SLT showed had to do with the team working to address issues from their current position in different ways. Without a doubt, this was positive. The nimbleness the SLT needed, however, was to be able to organize themselves for different functions – to shift from acting as consultants to making and implementing decisions, since the reason for the team's formation was to help implement the SOP (Higgins, Weiner, & Young, 2012). This meant that while the SLT did accomplish important work, it did not always achieve the goal of strong SOP implementation. It could be that the addition of other voices and stakeholders who would actually be doing the work would have made the team more nimble. I needed to evaluate more thoroughly whether both the SLT's conditions and context made it ripe for this kind of work.

In summary, this analysis highlighted four important lessons about developing a higher-functioning SLT. One, the foundation of this team needed to be strong. The key aspects of this foundation were trust and the safety to experiment and learn together. Two, the direction of the team had to be the driving force; this would have worked better if the purpose and vision were constantly revisited so that everyone moved in the same direction. Three, changing the conditions of working together and even the personal competencies of the members was not always enough to promote change. In particular, the team's culture and mind-sets were critical because in this particular case, they were the bedrock on which the other three C's rested.

Implications for Self, Site, and Sector

The work of teaming will never be complete. This SLT started the journey to becoming a highly functioning team over a year ago, and I joined them for a brief moment along their path. In the previous section I analyzed why the SLT might not have become a higher-functioning team according to every aspect of my Theory of Action in the short period of my residency. Still, they did make significant progress and I learned a lot from working with them. Here I discuss my reflections on this project, what I learned about myself and my leadership, what HPS might take away from this project as the SLT continues to develop, and what the K–12 education sector will need to consider as it strives to provide high-quality education to all.

Implications for Self

> Becoming an authentic leader is not easy. First, you have to understand yourself, because *the hardest person you will ever have to lead is yourself*. . . . Second, to be an effective leader, *you must take responsibility for your own development* (George, 2007, p. xxxiii).

Throughout this project, I was both helping to develop a higher-functioning SLT and participating on the SLT to move the district's work forward. Holding those two perspectives at the same time allowed me to practice several of my leadership strategies—communication, collaboration, political savvy, and personal development—which was a learning goal for this residency experience. Following are some of the most important things I learned.

Aim for the simplicity in a context of complexity. The issues facing districts and their SLTs are vast and complicated. What makes them more untenable is that there are still many unknowns in the task of preparing students for a future that is constantly evolving. As a leader in this context, I have to learn to create urgency for change, develop a vision and strategy, and communicate them broadly (Kotter, 2012). In order to do that well, I must be a

leader who embraces reinvention and looks both inward and outward, toward the district, to help transform outcomes for students (Wagner et al., 2006).

As I look inward, I recognize that one of my strongest leadership assets is my ability to build relationships even within complex environments. Being my authentic self, while at times difficult, is a way to simplify the connections I made in the complex environment in which I worked. I wrote this in January 2015:

> I question all the time how much of myself to bring to my work. While on campus I articulated my leadership purpose. My leadership purpose is to be a light and speak my truth as a way of empowering others to speak their own . . . .sadly, I am saddled by the double consciousness that in my daily work I sometimes contribute to the persistence of inequities and maintain the status quo. This is true; at the same time it is hard to admit because my intention is to do only good or at least do no harm as I find my way. My residency has afforded me the opportunity to see what this work looks like with other leaders and with the organization as a whole. It hurts and I know it's a sign of growth. I am thinking about how this is part of my journey towards living into the authentic leader I want to be.

More than half the senior leaders I worked with told me directly how comfortable I made them feel and how smoothly I transitioned onto the team and established myself as a contributing member. I built these relationships by taking a learning stance upon entering the organization, asking questions and offering suggestions where I felt appropriate, and spending time with each senior leader one on one. Working with such a large SLT, and forming strong relationships in which multiple members identified the value I added, leadership I displayed, or assistance I provided, reinforces for me the usefulness of this personal strength. I want to continue to build relationships and networks of thought partners in this fight for equity in public schools.

An area that remained complicated throughout this project was the story of the purpose for my work and what I was trying to accomplish. I felt I was constantly assisting others, trying to improve the usefulness of the time spent together, and helping senior leaders see themselves in the work of becoming a higher-functioning team that would

implement the new strategic plan, Cultivating Equity and Excellence 2020. However, not all the senior leaders saw my work that way. There were often questions about what my project was, and I mirrored that confusion. As I move forward, I need to be more explicit about the purpose and usefulness of my work and share it broadly. Having a clear purpose could have enabled others to both support and push my development.

In addition, being able to define my work in simple terms could have led others to embrace the ideas of changing the team's culture. Relationships and collaboration are complex ideas that need to be simplified by spelling out a compelling *why* behind them. My narrative could have explained this purpose and highlighted why I am passionate about this work. In the future, I would like to contemplate my leadership brand and articulate the simple reasons behind the complex work I want to do.

Embrace the Political and political natures of educational change. I have never considered myself a politician; I have never wanted to be one either. However, my work in HPS exposed the need for increasing political understanding and awareness if I truly want to improve educational outcomes for students. Bolman and Deal say, "Viewed from the political frame, politics is simply the realistic process of making decisions and allocating resources in a context of scarcity and divergent interest" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 181). Simply stated, politics does not have to be bad. My hesitancy to engage with politics at either the organizational level or in the external environment will not serve me well as I become the leader I strive to be.

There are several components to thinking politically as I exercise my leadership. I mistakenly assumed politics was about building a coalition of those who agreed and holding off those who disagreed (Heifetz, 2002). In fact, the most complex and essential parts of politics are convincing people I am trying to lead who are uncertain and skeptical about the

changes I pursue. I did not fully grasp the impact of a changing political landscape in Hartford and its impact on HPS. With a mayoral shift, in a district where the mayor appoints five of the nine board of education members, Dr. Narvaez was navigating a tricky political landscape of uncertainty. She was doing her best to create conditions where her strategies and priorities could garner board support. I was impatient about pursuing certain HPS goals. I realize now, pursuing some of those goals I was focused on would not have served the district or the superintendent well. Dr. Narvaez skillfully navigated these political landmines and used political savvy to accomplish most of the goals I had in mind and was impatient to pursue. As I move forward, I want to follow her example to ensure that decisions I make rest on the political forethought about how each choice builds toward my vision, in order to optimize each moment and to persuade those who are still uncommitted to the vision.

I am still learning from my management of organizational politics within the HPS SLT. I ended the project with excess political capital that I could have used to press my cause of changing the culture of the team. I did not spend enough time identifying and understanding the informal networks that existed within the team. I relied on my stronger relationships to acquire different facilitators for team building and to help fill in gaps in the planning I was doing. If I had paid even more attention to the informal networks I might have been able to leverage the relationships of others to help promote the work of increasing relational trust within the SLT. As I look to the future, I plan to be more deliberate in understanding both the external and internal political landscapes of my environment to find entry points for my work and ripe situations for moving my work forward.

Prioritize adult development: Create the space to become both a better leader and person. My own personal development is critical to ensuring that I can be the authentic leader I want to be. The work of self-transformation is difficult and important. As a leader, I

must be able to recognize when I am getting in my own way by creating barriers in an effort to avoid the self-fulfilling expectations of success or failure (Arbinger Institute, 2010). I approached this project trying to keep in mind that each senior leader is on an individual development journey. I truly love learning, so it was exciting for me to approach this project by thinking about it from multiple stages of adult development. What I did not anticipate was how the different ways of knowing would influence people's experiences on the team and my reaction to them. Those who were more instrumental and transactional in their way of knowing were constantly dissatisfied with the lack of explicit direction (Drago-Severson, 2008).

In my effort to create the right conditions, I underestimated the power of the team's culture. I attempted to create processes and structures that were important to me. I defaulted to thinking that the SLT would benefit most from interventions that matched the way I personally operate (Berger, 2012). However, everyone was not looking for their colleagues to be one in their primary support networks or to have the level of personal interaction that I value on a team. I needed to balance my personal philosophy of teaming with what the HPS SLT members wanted to create as their own culture. Effective interventions would be ones in which people would use the processes in place. For example, when I revamped the structure and calendar for the SLT meetings, no one used the new system. I had created a system that did not address the underlying adaptive issue that had been preventing the senior leaders from participating in the meetings. This adaptive issue was that they did not trust each other enough to want to step up and be accountable for running meetings. As my frustration grew, I accepted some distinction between the competency building and the learning orientation of the team. I know such a dichotomy does not lead to optimal learning for individuals or teams (Kegan et al., 2014). I now recognize that I need to be in an

environment and on a team that provides the support I need to process my thinking and learn from successes and challenges. The culture of the organization matters to me. I do not want a place that defaults to building processes and does not realize that processes are only as good as the people willing to use them.

Implications for Site

> To perform like a team, act like a team—together (Barth, 2003, p. 57).

Throughout this project, I was aiming to keep a reflective eye toward the work in HPS. My goal was that at the end of my residency, I would be able to make some observations about what the organization should continue doing and recommendations for what HPS might consider doing differently. I could not, however, maintain that reflective distance as I worked side by side with the SLT. What I offer here are implications for HPS based on synthesizing my own experiences and the reflections each of the senior leaders shared with me during the course of my work. For HPS, the most critical aspect of driving success is setting the right conditions to implement the work well. With becoming a more effective and efficient team as the goal, we needed to invest more in developing a shared purpose and vision, choose how we would evaluate that work, and ensure that our language and actions matched our espoused intentions.

Adjust the structure of the senior leadership team to create an actual team. There is a difference between a team and a group of individuals who meet to do work. A team is an integrated group of people who want to work together because they believe their work is important and can best be done collectively (Wageman, 2008). The prior analysis suggests the SLT in HPS still needs some work to be a high-functioning "real team." In order to develop into the higher-functioning team that this project intended, the structure of the team may need to shift. There are currently 15 fully active members on the SLT.

Research suggests that the ideal size is 4 to 6 people (Hackman, 2002). The size of the SLT made it more difficult to frame the work and develop the trust and psychological safety that can cultivate higher-functioning teams.

In addition to the size of the team, the composition of the team also matters. Research suggests implementation teams may be more successful when they have role diversity and have people on the team who are responsible for actually doing the work (Higgins et al., 2012). On this SLT there was role diversity, in that the head of every department was on the team, and I believe the superintendent tried to get closer to the work by including the assistant superintendents on the team. But I offer that there could be additional means of ensuring implementation that would involve smaller subgroups, including offline collaboration by the SLT members and other leaders in the organization who would more directly be carrying out the work of implementing the SOP to achieve the results intended. This could serve HPS in two ways. First, the competency and capacity of the central office leaders would increase. Second, when SLT members interacted with others they could model their expectations of a learning culture.

There were many highly capable senior leaders not always working together in the same direction; that happened because we did not spend enough time framing the purpose and establishing the conditions for learning. In addition, the relationships and psychological safety were slow to develop because of the current culture of the SLT. When the team launched, we did not allocate time for articulating what our purpose was and how we would know we were successful as a team. At this time, the senior leaders have yet to engage in the difficult conversations that would lead to building shared investment and ownership.

Without enough psychological safety on the team for them to work through potential disagreements, the group has very little holding it together. The only thing they

have to work from is investment in the strategic plan, which contains so much that the leaders can invest in different portions of it and their work can remain siloed. Some research suggests that building community is the final commitment, but my experience in HPS suggests that building community is fundamental to achieving that shared vision, so it must be done first (Kouzes, 2012).

The need to focus more on building relationships highlights a difference between the espoused and lived values of the senior leadership in HPS. The rhetoric of the SLT is that the team matters and needs to be strong, but the members' energy and attitudes do not always reflect this value. The SLT's largest expressed concern was that team building does not yield results for students and does not reflect the urgency with which we need to approach the dire situation some of our students face. Commitment to the urgency to improve results competes with commitment to the time needed to build relationships. If the senior leaders do not question their assumption that relationship building is a waste of time, however, they will not make the necessary progress. In fact, they reinforce the team's immunity to change. Kegan and Lahey say:

> Unquestioning acceptance of a big assumption anchors and sustains an immune system: A competing commitment makes all the sense in the world, and the person continues to engage in behaviors that support it, albeit unconsciously, to the detriment of his or her "official," stated commitment (Kegan & Lahey,, 2001, p. 14).

Focusing only on the outcomes and results has not led to the results that HPS leaders are looking for, so they need to be willing to engage more fully in changing themselves, and model the way forward, before trying to change everything around them (Kouzes, 2012). Leaders have to clarify their values and figure out how to align their actions with those shared values. Individual understanding and self-awareness make it easier to question one's own meaning-making system, which can lead to more effective teaming.

Building relationships goes beyond interpersonal connections; it also involves the senior leaders' responses to their environment given their work styles and roles. Taking inventory of the work currently happening and understanding work-style preferences are two key elements of creating a real team (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2013). Leveraging work-style preferences can lead to more effective matching of roles. Here, without clarity of roles and functions, it was often difficult for senior leaders to know when and how to engage in productive conflict that would lead to more effective implementation of key decisions as a team.

The SLT in HPS can take two key steps to becoming a higher-functioning team. Already, the superintendent has downsized the SLT by nearly a third in the hope of improving performance and culture next year. In addition, the SLT should allocate adequate time and resources for developing relationships through proven methods such as engaging in collaborative work groups or shared learning experiences. Also, the senior leaders could develop a greater sense of community by using their own suggestions for how to build relationships in this context. Table 6 contains the senior leaders' suggestions.

Table 6: Senior Leaders' Suggestions for Building Relationships

Suggestion	Number of Leaders Suggesting
Work in small groups in and out of meetings	5
Schedule an off-site retreat	3
Actively engage those who are not engaged	2
Reduce group size	2
Embrace the idea of building relationships	1
Demonstrate that members value one another	1

Intertwine adult development with the instructional focus of the senior leadership team. Adult development is a lens for approaching the work as well as an end in itself. Dr. Narvaez is clear that the SLT should treat teaching and learning like a crisis situation because of the inequitable outcomes for some students. This goal is best served by the principles of adult development. When adult development and instruction are separate, senior leaders may waste time trying to protect their image as opposed to focusing on learning (Kegan & Lahey, 2001). A dogged focus on protecting ego is ultimately a bigger waste of time than intertwining technical skills and developmental skills.

It requires intentionality to get senior leaders to share their development goals and support one another in pursuing them. In this case, we did not make the space for SLT members to clarify and share their own values and how they view the organization as a way of better understanding their entry point into the work as a team. In my private conversations, however, all the senior leaders shared their values and goals with me. Many senior leaders have an individual understanding of their role and the importance of adult development. We did not effectively calibrate during the project and so, the integration of business and personal goals that could more effectively enable organizational learning has not yet happened (Kegan, 2016).

HPS could make three small changes to improve the conditions for adult development in the SLT. First, design more intentional opportunities for all members of the team to see themselves in the work. This could build on the leadership reflection and cultural competency work that is already happening. Second, diagnose the SLT's resistance to changing to better understand the way they have been operating, and acknowledge the inevitable losses. I notice that the senior leaders' feelings were not always welcome at the table during conversations, and so there was tension about how much of themselves they

felt they could reveal in their work. Last, replace accountability language such as *monitoring* with something like "inquiring about" or other language that allows for a learning orientation. This would allow team members to coach and develop one another. A learning frame creates space to see others as they see themselves and not only as others see them (Berger, 2012).

Clearly articulate a compelling direction for the senior leadership team and district and communicate it broadly. With the new strategic plan, Cultivating Equity and Excellence 2020, the leadership of HPS embarked on a five-year journey that aims to meet nine equity indicators. Nine is way too many focus areas for a team to work on at once, but we kept trying to pay equal attention to all nine indicators through December 2015. Not choosing which equity indicators were most important to address first diffused our focus and stalled the team. In trying to pay attention to too many things at once, we came up short on all fronts. Despite the noblest of intentions and the relentless energy expended, many school districts impede their own progress for this very reason (Wagner et al., 2006).

A compelling direction and purpose is essential to having a strong SLT because it holds these leaders, each of whom are CEOs of their own departments (Wageman, 2008). This is even more critical in the portfolio model, where the direction is the only constant in the different groups. If leaders do not prioritize and publicize their vision, other people may assign one to them. Clarity of direction also minimizes the possibility that individual leaders will prioritize what is important to them as individuals instead of what is best for the team.

In addition to creating a clear focus, prioritizing a particular area can also be important because it allows the team to build on the momentum of work already being done. Each important change cannot be a focus, but having an order of operations allows the team's energy and momentum to create a cascading effect of change. Real-time learning is needed to understand the impact of actions being taken and to determine which initiatives

beget which. This is why it is important for the SLT to work together to determine the priorities in a collaborative process so that the priorities become shared (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2013). As an SLT, we made quicker progress when we gave ourselves permission to focus on two areas, budget development and the Acceleration Agenda, because we combined our efforts. Those two priorities gave us leverage because they touched on multiple equity indicators and set the tone that resources would be allocated based on the priorities of the SOP.

Senior leaders on the team should consider taking three steps, which they have already started. First, take stock of HPS's current initiatives to determine which are most compelling and which could be discontinued. Second, select only a few priorities for the coming school year and focus on succeeding in these areas. Finally, create a long-term plan for fitting the chosen priorities into a broader vision for accomplishing the five-year goals of the strategic plan.

Implications for Sector

> Culture beats strategy (Lloyd, 2000, p. 52).

Changing the ways districts educate children is an urgent problem. In an age when the goal is excellence and equity for all students, there is a push for college and career readiness, but "The system has not failed. It was designed perfectly to produce the results it needed, and attained" (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 9). Schools were never built for every student to achieve at the highest level. In the K–12 education sector, we are so bent on movement and action that often we forget the first goal must always be to set right conditions to enable effective action, which is critical to success. I realized I needed to make setting conditions for the team to come together the focus of my project, and HPS has already started this work by focusing on its leaders. Research suggests that people becoming better colleagues

and evaluating data together will promote change for our students by harnessing collective power (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2013). Such major changes require a culture of commitment and they take time.

Realize that a strategic plan is a frame but is not compelling enough to drive daily work. Aligning the work of the district under a cohesive and comprehensive strategic plan that responds to the particular context and needs of a school district is an important task for change (Johnson, 2015). This work requires that district leaders make choices to ensure that activities and resources are aligned toward this goal. However, the work of a senior leadership team is not simply to embody the strategic plan's purpose and mission nor is it to amass the individual work of the team members (Wageman, 2008). An SLT can be more effective when it coalesces to determine a specific purpose and to identify interdependent tasks that move this work forward. The work can also be more effective and efficient when this purpose is continually refined.

A district's strategic plan is its anchor. When alignment is tight, every initiative and resource promotes the changes articulated in the plan. But when a plan is five years in the making, like Cultivating Equity and Excellence 2020 in HPS, it is difficult to map the minutiae of daily work to such lofty goals. There is a need to focus and prioritize which decisions and initiatives need to be addressed first as the district moves towards accomplishing its long-term goals. As a sector, we need to stop relying on the strategic plan as the only necessary frame for the work. Each strategic plan must be broken into priorities that leaders can address on a daily basis.

The HPS SLT team is a model for how to hone the district's focus. As my project ended, the team was engaging in a process that will increase their ability to align actions and resources to the pursuit of achieving a manageable number of goals. The leaders decided to

elevate one problem of practice—developing the budget—and one strategy in action—the Acceleration Agenda—as priorities because they embodied several of the equity indicators. The structure was emerging, but team members had started to accept that focusing on the Acceleration Agenda meant allowing other initiatives to be deprioritized so as not to diffuse their attention. Other school districts could learn from this narrowing of focus because it allowed the senior leaders to give attention and resources to a high-leverage action needed to implement the strategic plan. This progress toward an emphasis on strategic priorities is a good example of how districts, not just Hartford, can gain purchase on the complex process of enabling improvement across a district.

Balance the focus on strategy or instruction with the power of culture to effect change. School, as a symbol, elicits varied reactions based on the meaning people construct from their experiences. "The symbolic frame focuses on how humans make sense of the messy, ambiguous world, in which they live" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 240). Improving educational outcomes, then, involves dealing with the strategies and skills of the educators as well as the culture and symbolism attached to the institution of the school itself. This is a fact that HPS is beginning to address head on. The work at the SLT level has already started creating other spaces for people to engage in critical cultural dialogue.

In this project, many senior leaders experienced team culture the same way but never named areas of growth for the group. All the leaders admitted that they held back from the team, and even when they did suggest changes, they were often technical tweaks. My experience with the SLT leads me to believe that a strong culture, not instructional strategy, is the driving force for change. No matter how the competencies or conditions shift, if the culture is not right, meaning it is not welcoming or safe, the leaders will not engage fully.

Full engagement and commitment mean the difference between making change happen and making it stick (Kotter, 2006, 2012). In the changing political environment of school districts, leaders are often looking for short-term wins. Of course these wins are important: they create momentum on which to build deep-rooted change. But they can reduce urgency. When leaders lose focus, counterproductive behavioral habits are likely to return (Kotter, 2012). The K–12 sector is in need of long-lasting, systematic change, and there are many poor behavioral habits to overcome. This project has helped me realize that the leader's relentless focus is best leveraged when it balances skills and culture.

The education sector should be intentional about creating a culture that promotes adult learning in order to prepare for the unknowns of the future. This means that leaders must have the flexibility to identify change patterns and explore ways to improve. It also reinforces the focus on relationships and trust because they strongly support learning.

Accept that adults and leaders also work best in a collaborative learning environment. In the past, education was the passing of knowledge from teacher to students. This model will not be successful in the future because there is no one finite, known body of knowledge from which to draw. The education sector needs to see teachers as expert facilitators instead of content experts. Facilitating is a skill that is easily learned through the teaming process. So too is the case for adults who lead in the sector, such as senior district team members.

This orientation to framing as learning is a transition for teams because it is an active process (Edmondson, 2012a). Leaders need to experiment and try new research-based initiatives, with the understanding that many will fail. However, "mistakes rarely become problems unless compounded by more mistakes" (Barth, 2003, p. 36). If districts are allowed the time and space to learn from failure, instead of facing the threat of replacing the

superintendent within the first three years or being taken over by the state, then collaborative learning might be more effective. It would also mean that districts had the responsibility to not let ineffective practices linger. This would require trust, which is in short supply between districts and the context in which they operate.

This project highlights one of the major reasons for lack of trust. Senior leaders identified a dichotomy between collaborative inquiry or team learning and urgency for change, but I maintain this distinction is a false one. Moving quickly cannot be the only goal because it does not include movement in the right direction. Collaboration and inquiry set the stage to leverage all participants' best thinking so they can move efficiently and in a compelling direction. This is something the K–12 sector needs to consider because moving quickly in the direction that is known still produces inequitable outcomes for students.

An important question for the sector to explore is how to move forward in a context that had low levels of psychological safety and trust as well as high avoidance of accountability from group members – a combination often found in school districts. The work with the HPS SLT helped me understand several potential pathways to increasing the trust needed for effective collaboration. First, the leader needs to clearly articulate the vision for how the team might operate. Team members can become clearer on the values of the leader and the expectations for collaboration. This helps the team because the members can self-select whether or not the team is the right fit for them and the leader can assess a values match to ensure the right people are on the team (Wageman, 2008). Second, the leader needs to call out and address the presence of lack of trust and avoidance of accountability specifically. Once the value for collaboration is clear, the leader needs to take the first step to reinforce this value in interactions with the group. This is a combination of two practices. One, the leader may need to acknowledge the history and hurt already present in the group

and connect that to the lack of trust. Two, the leader needs to acknowledge and address the tensions that may arise between the new expectations and the normal ways of operating. By holding the line and making it clear that collaboration is the new expectation, the leader builds psychological safety because she sets a baseline for interaction and holds every individual accountable for their personal choices (Lencioni, 2002).

In addition to the leader driving this change, there needs to be collective support for increasing trust and accountability amongst the members of the team. Another path to increasing psychological safety is to use subgroup collaboration and inquiry to collectively accomplish goals (Boudett et al., 2013). The collaboration process could involve getting to know each other's work style preferences and how an individual's value system influences their entry into this work. Collaboration is a way to build the trust and accountability simultaneously. Still another way to involve team members in creating a trusting, collaborative, and effective culture is to solicit their input on the work that needs to be done. In HPS, the senior leaders had ideas about how to develop the collaborative relationships they wanted to see, and by creating the space for them to take a leadership role in promoting this change in culture, it increased the shared accountability for how the team experienced collaborative practices and the learning they distilled from participating on the team.

Seek to create high-functioning leadership teams as a lever for district change. District transformation research is limited in scope even though school districts serve most school-aged children in the United States. Current research suggests that central offices need to become organizations that prioritize learning by reflecting on practice, assessing the efficacy of their work, and adjusting to make improvements (Honig et al., 2010). I urge the

sector to consider that change agents might be more effective at this work if they participate in high-functioning senior leadership teams.

Leadership teams are primarily responsible for implementing initiatives and moving the district vision forward. Often this work takes place in unstable political contexts that can make the membership on the team unstable (Higgins et al., 2012). While the team members may change, the work of the team remains consistently focused on achieving better outcomes for students. Leadership teams are often too large to hold the culture and promote the change they desire (Wageman, 2008). When the leader takes steps to ensure the right numbers of people are matched in the right positions and roles on the team, it can create some instability in team membership that will actually better serve the function of the team in the long run.

Thus, the sector should consider that instead of only focusing on the collaboration of particular individuals, it becomes more important to identify the interdependencies and connections between the roles and the work of specific team positions. This way, if the person in that role changes, the work can still proceed because it is more dependent on the position than the individual. Again, this highlights the importance of team culture because developing these interdependent work connections allows the team to become more effective and efficient in moving its work forward.

The political environment of public education moves so quickly that district leaders are often forced to distinguish themselves from those who preceded them and to show immediate results in order to retain their positions. This environment is a difficult one in which to remain committed to learning, because learning takes time and the processes can seem inefficient (Higgins et al., 2012). However, teams that know each other better,

communicate well, and are responsive to one another's needs are actually more productive than other sorts of teams, even though the process looks different from what educators are accustomed to seeing from their leaders (Duhigg, 2016). If learning is the goal and teams provide a useful mechanism for learning, then the sector needs to spend more time understanding adult development, teaming, and how to leverage the groups of people districts already have to get better outcomes for students.

Conclusion

> Team learning is the process of aligning and developing the capacity of a team to create the results its members truly desire. It builds on the discipline of developing shared vision. It also builds on personal mastery, for talented teams are made up of talented individuals. But shared vision and talent are not enough. The world is full of teams of talented individuals who share a vision for a while, yet fail to learn (Senge, 2006, pp. 218–219).

HPS is deeply committed to achieving positive educational outcomes for all students. It asserts this by setting audacious goals such as 100% college acceptance for all students in its strategic plan, Cultivating Equity and Excellence 2020. Dr. Narvaez recognized that achieving these bold goals would take new ways of teaching and learning as well as new ways of organizing. She brought me in to assist with developing an SLT that would lead the district in implementing this strategic plan. With the changing local landscape in Hartford and the changing educational landscape of adopting higher-level standards, the question remains as to how to accomplish this goal in the unique context and culture of HPS.

Throughout this project, I sought to create a higher-functioning SLT that would model the way for the district. This SLT would actively work together and become a "real team" built on foundations of relational trust and psychological safety. My intention was that these teaming practices would help the senior leaders focus on learning about themselves as well as learning the competencies necessary to lead others for learning. This organizational priority is a key HPS strategy for organizational learning that leads to district transformation. As leaders focus on their own learning, building coalitions and networks of support both within the organization and outside in the community, they must be disciplined in their use of this critical information.

Ensuring that HPS is a place of equity and excellence in 2020 is no small task because it requires the central office, schools, students, families, and the community to

organize differently so as not to get the same old results. All this change is happening in tenuous times of changing politics, decreasing resources, and increasing uncertainty about what skills are necessary for success in the future. The SLT is an important starting point because collaboration and change happen best in the right organizational culture. The senior leaders get to model the culture and be relentless in their belief that learning together will build more transformational outcomes for students.

This capstone underscores the importance of district leaders for modeling the right attitude toward learning and change. We made many technical changes in terms of developing processes and creating opportunities, and there was progress in the direction of learning such as increased incorporation of feedback, being nimble, and making individual connections. The results show that without changing culture, it remains difficult to foster lasting change. In fact, a lingering question is whether the SLT mirrors the dysfunctions of the system or the system mirrors that of the leaders. Another lingering question is whether or not culture is always the driving lever for change.

Each member of the HPS SLT feels an individual imperative to improve the outcomes for students in the district, but this belief manifests differently for each of them. This capstone serves as a reminder that a commitment to learning is essential for both students and adults. HPS highlights this new orientation in the strategic plan, and the SLT serves as an example of how complicated it can be to hold together attention to building skills and attention to learning. This ability to weave capabilities and learning together, though, is essential for transforming districts into organizations with the capacity to adapt and be successful in their constantly moving contexts. For true change to permeate the entire district, I argue that senior leaders must decide on a compelling direction and narrative to use as an anchor and guide for that work.

Change in the way districts operate is necessary if the sector truly values equitable outcomes for all students, and I recognize that this is questionable. How committed is the sector to engaging in the transformation required to precipitate needed change? The path forward requires two fundamental shifts. First, the sector needs to require that leaders invest in their own personal development because transforming oneself is the key to transforming the sector. Second, the adults in the system must value learning for themselves the way they aspire for students. By adopting a learning orientation, system leaders create the space to move with students into the unknown future.

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Appendix 1: Overview of the Sheff vs. O'Neill Decision

Appendix D

Overview of the Sheff vs. O'Neill Decision

In 1996, the Connecticut Supreme Court ruled in Sheff v O'Neil that racial isolation in the state's schools denied students an "equal educational opportunity" and ordered the legislature to devise a remedy (Milo Sheff, et al. v William A. O'Neill, et al., 238 Conn. 1, 678A.2nd 1267, Connecticut Superior Court 1996). The Sheff remedy was intended to create opportunities for Harford families to attend over 28 non-magnet public school districts outside of Hartford through Open Choice opportunities. Additionally, families have access to more than 50 magnet school options in the Greater Hartford Region operated by a variety of partners, including Hartford Public Schools, Capitol Region Education Council (CREC), Goodwin College, East Hartford Public Schools, and Bloomfield Public Schools.

Sheff remedies can play an increasing role in helping to create integrated opportunities that align with reform efforts to increase quality in neighborhoods and enable families to select quality where they live.

Efforts to look at other models (such as Light House Schools) hold promise for creating new options for Hartford resident students It is possible that the future direction of the "Sheff IV" agreement to more closely align with mutually beneficial efforts, will create a win/win of educational improvement and decreased racial isolation for Hartford Public Schools as a whole.

Undoubtedly, the Sheff remedy has spurred access and greater opportunity for Hartford resident students' access to reduce isolation and increase educational opportunities.[15]

[15] Gross, Betheny, and Jones, J., *Integration and Better Options: Are Hartford's Minority Students Benefiting from Connecticut's Sheff Provisions?* Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington (2014).

Appendix 2: Introduction to the Hartford Public Schools Transition Report, October 2014

Introduction

Dr. Beth Narvaez came to the Hartford superintendency with a commitment to listen, learn, help boost the achievement of all students, and ensure all students have equitable opportunities to achieve their dreams. Prior to her first day on the job, she engaged with Hartford Public Schools (HPS) stakeholders representing diverse people, interests, perspectives, demographic factors and roles. The findings included in this report were generated through "listening sessions" and meetings held by Dr. Narvaez as well as focus groups held by members of the Transition Team, which altogether involved well over 700 stakeholders. In addition, over 1,000 people responded to a community stakeholder survey that tapped into the views of Hartford parents, HPS employees, and citizens. Dr. Narvaez's signal to the community has been clear: the superintendent is accessible and envisions on-going outreach and engagement with the community.

Dr. Narvaez appointed a *Transition Team* beginning in July to assist in her efforts to quickly learn about the Hartford Public Schools and to set a foundation for working with the HPS community to create a strategic set of actions to accelerate progress and help HPS keep its promises to the children and families of Hartford. The Transition Team was organized into **five focus area teams**:

1. *Organizational Culture and Leadership*
2. *Teaching and Learning*
3. *Equity and Excellence*
4. *Family and Community Engagement*
5. *Organizational and Operational Effectiveness*

Each focus area team was led by co-leaders including one external member and an HPS senior staff member.[1] The teams analyzed multiple sources of data, studies, evaluations, and student performance results, and engaged a cross section of HPS stakeholder groups in one-on-one meetings, focus groups, interviews, group and organizational meetings, community forums, and through a comprehensive community stakeholder survey. The team's work focused on responding to overall guiding questions as well as specific questions relevant to their focus areas. The guiding questions included reflections on strengths in the district's work and history; how those strengths are creating conditions for success for HPS students; challenges and how they are getting in the way of ensuring that every school and every student thrives; opportunities for improvement that will have the greatest impact on performance in the shortest amount of time; and opportunities for improvement that will require longer-term strategies.

The Transition Team was well supported by an internal team of HPS staff members who worked diligently to respond to information requests, organize meetings and data, transcribe notes from numerous staff and community engagement events, and keep the Transition Team informed of significant events in the district and community. The information and analysis from this rich set of data sources is the basis for the findings and recommendations included in this report.

The voices of stakeholders across the spectrum of the Hartford Public Schools and the community it serves were integral to the learning of the five Transition Team focus areas. Throughout this report, the Transition Team worked to ensure that the perspectives, wisdom, aspirations and concerns of HPS stakeholders are represented in the findings and recommendations. The findings and recommendations offer a valuable foundation that will require additional vetting and

[1] See Appendix for the full Transition Team list.

discussion both internally and externally. HPS will work through the recommendations to identify *targeted strategies* that will provide focus in order to strengthen the capacity of the district.

One of the many Transition Team findings from the engagement process is that Hartford has a community invested in our schools and interested in doing their part to ensure that the children enrolled in HPS receive a quality education. The Transition Team appreciates the many stakeholders who participated in surveys, contributed to focus groups, invested in small and large group engagement activities led by Dr. Narvaez and her staff, and in other ways answered the call for input to inform the work of the Transition Team.

Structure of the Report

This report is organized into a summary of major, cross-cutting themes, followed by an overview of what we learned in each focus area. The findings and recommendations for each focus area team are compiled into a summary table. For significant additional descriptions of the findings and recommendations (including a detailed articulation of strengths and areas for improvement in each focus area), the reader can access an addendum document titled *"Detailed Findings & Recommendations for Strengthening Hartford Public Schools"* at www.hartfordschools.org.

Summary of Major Themes

The themes in this section include the overarching areas uncovered from the work across all of the focus area teams. While the findings and recommendations section includes detailed suggested next steps for the district, these summary themes are cross-cutting; that is, they interweave throughout the recommendations and are addressed by pursuing the full range of recommendations in this report. The ***cross-cutting themes*** in the report are:

1. *Educational Excellence and Equity – A Shared Commitment*
2. *Urgency to Improve Neighborhood Schools and Overall Performance*
3. *Meaningful Engagement, Effective Communications and Relationships*
4. *Central Office Transformation*
5. *Talent Development and Leadership*
6. *Leveraging Governance Structures to Strengthen City-Wide Collaboration and Commitment*

Educational Excellence and Equity – A Shared Commitment: Although the school district and community do not have a common definition of educational excellence and equity, we learned that everyone agrees that all students deserve access to a high quality educational experience in HPS schools, without regard to school location or type. Educational excellence and equity is nearly a universal aspiration, but many HPS stakeholders are concerned that inequality and unequal access disproportionately impact children of color, and they also have strong perceptions that: English Language Learners (ELL), children designated as special education (SPED), and children enrolled in most neighborhood schools have less access to magnets and Choice schools; neighborhood schools are not funded adequately; and large disparities exist in the quality of physical buildings and material conditions of magnet and neighborhood schools. Addressing these concerns in order to attain educational excellence and equity is a high priority widely supported by HPS stakeholders.

Urgency to Improve Neighborhood Schools and Overall Performance: There are successful neighborhood schools, but many need significant improvement. Improving neighborhood schools in need is an immediate priority and requires re-thinking many aspects of the school district.

Ensuring that every school has an effective principal and well-prepared teaching staff that can differentiate instruction to meet the needs of each student; providing differentiated systems of support from Central Office, with the assistance of strong, focused and intensive Portfolio Teams; and offering access to a curriculum that exposes all learners to rigorous content, are necessary to address the academic performance of all students. Overwhelmingly, all stakeholders are committed to building on the strong Choice programs and transforming all neighborhood schools to become beacons of excellence.

Additionally, we urgently need to close opportunity and performance gaps and accelerate learning for ELL, SPED, Latino and African-American students who depend heavily on our schools for the supports they need. This includes focusing our attention on the issue of unequal access to high-quality facilities, and developing a long-range facilities and capital improvement plan. We also need to address chronic absenteeism in a systematic way, and make efforts to dramatically reduce out-of-school suspensions.

Meaningful Engagement, Effective Communications and Relationships: HPS residents and stakeholders want to be engaged in shaping the future of HPS at the school, system and community levels. They seek engagement that is authentic, relevant and sustained in order to achieve the aspirations held by HPS students, families, staff, community-based organizations, elected and appointed officials leading the school district and municipality, business leaders and philanthropists. Family and community engagement, in particular, has two important dimensions: to provide students with the support of families and community to serve as partners in learning; and to invest in building strong families and an engaged community to impact the overall health and wellness, and attractiveness of Hartford to families, now and into the future. Hartford is fortunate to have diverse resources across families, foundations, community-based organizations, business leaders, policy leaders, political leaders, and invested HPS staff – all of whom are well-positioned for further investment in the system.

Nearly all stakeholders recognized the importance of better communications throughout HPS, both within the district and between the district and the community. Whether expressing concern about communications across departments and managing silos within the Central Office or the lack of a welcoming environment for parents and families in school offices, people value good, two-way communications and relationships built upon respect, collaborative planning and collective problem-solving. Many people strongly endorsed Dr. Narvaez's engagement and outreach activities and urge her to continue these activities throughout her term to deepen meaningful communications and collaboration.

Central Office Transformation: The transformation of Central Office structure, roles, function and effectiveness is an important priority to provide schools and students with culturally responsive, Common Core learning standards-based instruction that is delivered consistently in all schools. The Portfolio Team is a promising commitment of staff and resources that many HPS stakeholders believe to be an important and helpful structure, though it needs additional definition, refinement and supports. Many stakeholders asserted the need for important changes in the role and operation of Central Office. Central Office – including instructional and non-instructional departments – is expected to provide high-quality leadership in all areas of district work. Issues to be addressed in this area include non-instructional Central Office units with significant resource deficiencies that make it difficult to effectively respond to maintenance, repair and cleanliness needs of schools. Additionally, absence of focus, clarity and coherence contribute to the lack of Central Office effectiveness. Silos, fragmented department structures, inadequate collaboration across offices and departments, and undefined decision-making frameworks are also areas requiring immediate action.




There is also a great need to clarify the meaning of "autonomy." The district currently lacks shared understanding of the parameters for autonomy and decision-making and many stakeholders noted the adverse impact of this uncertainty and the need for a uniform and consistent decision-making structure. Additionally, the absence of shared understanding of the district's policy and practices on autonomy contributes to inconsistencies that result in ambiguities regarding administration at the school and district levels.

Talent Development and Leadership: A well-prepared, high-quality staff is essential to address the complex issues and challenges raised in this report. A high-performing instructional and non-instructional staff is essential to accomplish HPS' vision. Aggressive efforts are necessary to ensure that every student has a highly effective teacher and all schools are led by principals with the skills and commitment necessary to achieve equity and excellence, including culturally responsive approaches to teaching and learning. Staff at all levels need more differentiated and focused professional learning. Further, strategic staffing should be weighed as an approach to assure that schools serving the children with the greatest need have the best possible principals, teachers and staff.

The current accountability system should also be redesigned to one that uses multiple measures, is performance-based, is focused on building capacity and access to opportunities to learn, and is comprehensive and reciprocal in terms of the relationship between schools and Central Office. Lastly, the district should invest in creating a more stable system of leadership for the long haul.

Leveraging Governance Structures to Strengthen Citywide Collaboration and Shared Commitment: Real change takes time and commitment. System stability and productive relationships between the superintendent, the school board, the mayor, the city council and all elected officials are important to getting the work done in Hartford. The recommendations included in this report have a higher probability of success when Hartford's governmental structures are aligned in efforts to build the community and political support needed to sustain an equity-driven, achievement-focused coalition. Such coalesced and aligned efforts that engage Hartford's racial, ethnic and socio-economic groups are essential to accomplishing the difficult-to-achieve recommendations included in this Transition Team Report.

Appendix 3: Superintendent's Note and Graphic Representation of the Hartford Public Schools Strategic Plan, Cultivating Equity and Excellence 2020

Dear Hartford Public Schools Community,

A strategic plan gives organizations, and communities, permission to believe that great things are possible. It is a canvas for innovation, a blueprint for action, and a framework for accountability. It defines what we will continue to do, where we will course-correct, and where we must embrace change. It is the "story of now."

The Hartford Public Schools' path to achieving great things lies somewhere between continuity and change. Any amount of change has to start with a change in attitude, a change in mindset. In this strategic plan, I propose five bold new changes in mindset that will lead to changes in practice:

- Personalized learning centered around each and every student
- Focus on leadership
- Collaboration among leaders and schools , not competition
- Commitment to equity
- Meaningful family and community partnership

These five changes in mindset flow throughout the plan. They are anchored by the two big, bold goals I have emphasized since before I arrived in Hartford: every student thrives and every school is high performing. "Putting students at the center of their learning" and "developing leaders to lead for learning" are the drivers for achieving these bold goals, and for achieving a series of equity indicators that will measure progress and demonstrate success for ALL of our students, ALL of our schools, and ALL of us as a community.

We propose three high leverage actions for putting students at the center of their learning so that every student thrives and three high leverage actions for developing leaders to lead for learning so that every school is high-performing. Our plan is deliberately focused on just these six high leverage actions. Focus conveys clear expectations, a standard for decision-making, and a basis for gauging success, while still leaving plenty of room for creative educators and partners to innovate.

The ideas that comprise this plan emerged from a comprehensive engagement process that included students, teachers, administrators, families, community partners, and the Board of Education. Over and over again, we were reminded that to be successful in our work together we must, share a common understanding of our goals, set high expectations for ourselves, just like we do for our students, and measure both outcomes and progress along multiple dimensions. We believe this plan rises to that standard.

I look forward to continuing to partner with you to bring new mindsets, bold goals, the right strategies, and focused implementation together to achieve great possibilities for all of our learners.

Sincerely,

Beth Schiavino-Narvaez, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

"Every student thrives and every school is high performing."

VISION

HPS students will transform their world.

MISSION

Inspire and prepare ALL students to create their own success in and beyond school.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

ALL STUDENTS:

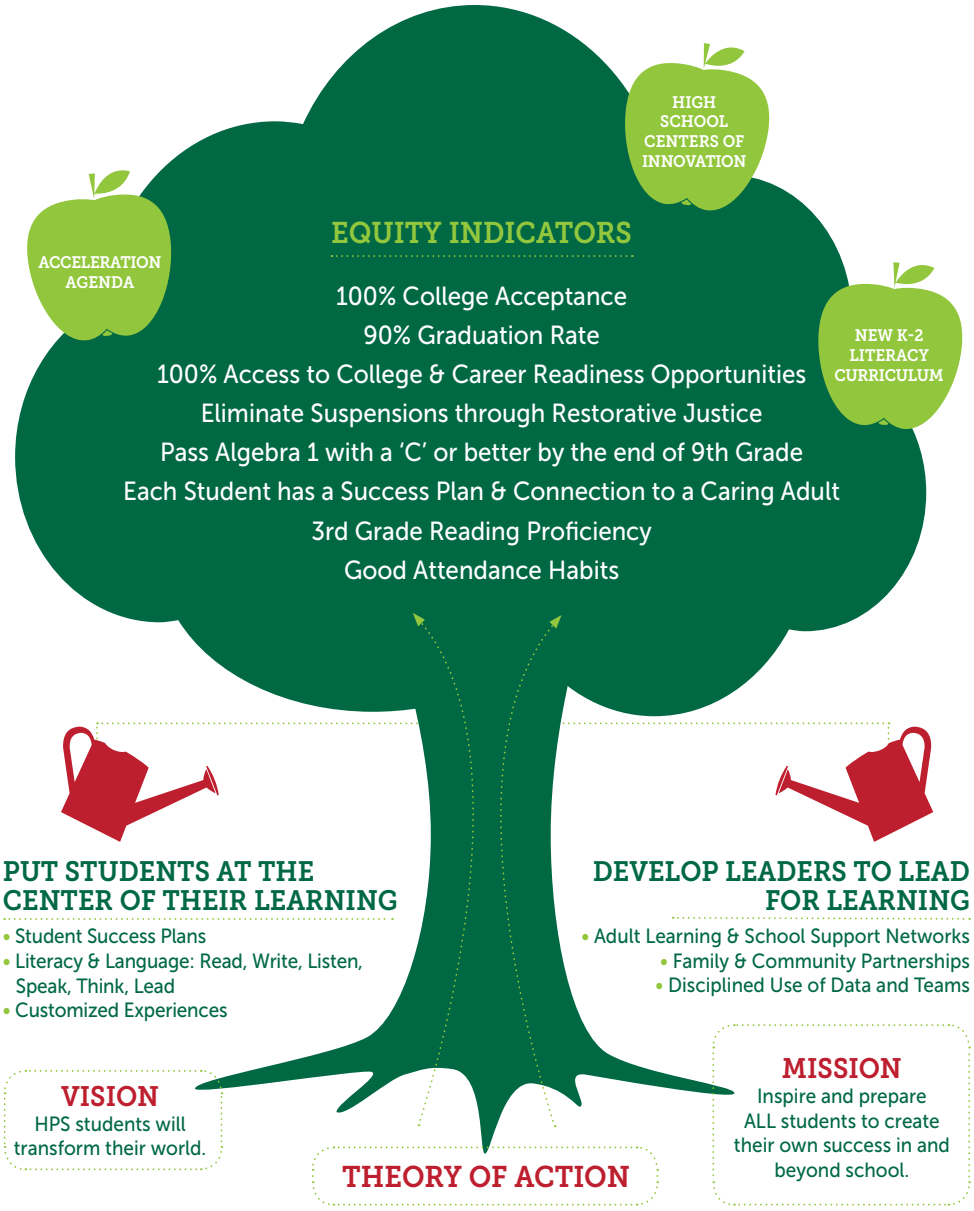
- Have their own unique story.
- Have voices that are valued and elevated.
- Have the inherent wisdom and capacity to learn and achieve at a high level.
- Are supported to engage in rigorous content.
- Respond to deep, meaningful relationships with teachers, principals, counselors and coaches.
- Benefit from the support of informed and engaged families, caregivers, and community champions.
- Are active co-creators of our community's future growth and success.

LEARNING IS STRONGEST WHEN:

- High expectations are developed and embraced by students, families, teachers, and community.
- It is differentiated based on specific needs, interests, strengths, learning styles, backgrounds, and aspirations of individual students.
- Teaching and systems are culturally responsive.
- It is connected to the real world.
- It encompasses the whole person.
- It occurs in a culture of commitment to adult learning.
- It is joyful.

THE STORY OF NOW – OUR 5 E'S THEORY OF ACTION

2



If we set and hold all students to high **EXPECTATIONS** + If we **ENGAGE** all students in meaningful, differentiated ways that match their needs and meet their interests + If we focus on the growth of **EACH AND EVERY** student and school + If we **EXPAND** the capacity of our leaders, staff, and schools ▶ Then, we will achieve **EQUITABLE** outcomes in which every student thrives and every school is high performing

Appendix 4. Hartford Public Schools Senior Leadership Team Retreat Agenda, August 31, 2015

Agenda

- Agenda Overview
- Good Work Shout-outs
- Norms / Agreements
- Compass Points
- How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work
- Break
- Our Team
- Data Wise Improvement Process: Why? How?
- Senior Leadership Team Goal Setting
- Personal Goal Setting
- Key Messages

Appendix 5. Semistandardized One-to-One Interview Questions

Cycle 1 – October 12, 2015 – October 26, 2015
Opening

- Explain purpose: to check in and figure out how the first round of monitoring went and try to do some real time adjustment as we prepare for the next iteration of the process
- Tell me a little about yourself and your work in HPS?
- What brings you to the work in education and specifically, if any reason in HPS?

Unpacking the ideas of teaming and adult learning

- Why were you selected to be on the cabinet/associate sup/SLT?
- What is your understanding of the purpose of the SLT?
    - How comfortable/confident are you with this purpose?
    - What if anything do you see as the difference in purpose between cabinet/assistant superintendent team and SLT?
- What is your role on the cabinet/ assistant superintendent team and SLT teams?
    - What strengths and challenges do you bring to the team?
- Who is the leader of the team and what is your perspective on the effectiveness of the leadership?
- Do you think your opinion counts on the SLT?
    - What is the process for making your opinion known if you disagree with the direction or a decision?
- Whom, if anyone, on the SLT team would you turn to for help? Why?
- Do you have a personal area of growth that you are working on? Does it align with the one you discussed with your supervisor?
    - Are you comfortable sharing your area of growth and development with me? What is your area of growth or development?
    - Are you comfortable sharing this with other members on the SLT?
    - Do you actively work on transcending this growth edge? What do you do?
- What are the opportunities, challenges, and strengths of the team?
    - Do you perceive this team as being committed to high quality work?
    - Do you see this team making real time progress? If yes, how? If no, why not?
- What would you like to see this team do, if anything, and why?

Unpacking the experience of the first round of monitoring content and process

- What went well for you in the first round of monitoring? What did you learn or become exposed to that you appreciated?
- What did not work well for you in the first round of monitoring?

- What is the top change you would you like to see in how the SLT pays attention to the progress on the strategic plan?
    - Are there any additional supports, structures or personal learning needs you need to be addressed to feel more like we are developing a SLT?
- What are the opportunities or possibilities for things this SLT team could accomplish that you cannot do on your own?
- What would you like to offer to the team as an area where you could be helpful and be a leader?

Closing 1:1

- Are there any questions you have for me?
- What, if anything, would you like to see me do with the information you provided me with today?

Cycle 2 – February 5, 2015 – February 24, 2015

Purpose of this interview

- Following up with the interviews I started in the beginning of the year
- Talking about the impact, if any, of some of the processes and structures we have put in place this year.
    - I am asking questions about the team, your personal experience, and the extent to which you identify with any of the practices we have sought to infuse into the SLT.
- Confidentiality – again, this is only for me and will not be shared with anyone
    - *If asked: Again, if there is interest I will be compiling high level themes and take-aways that will be accessible.*

Opening

- How are you? What is on the top of your mind right now?
- Starting with Some Numbers – could you fill out this quick survey that will help bring to the top of your mind the work you do with the Senior Leadership Team
- If you could highlight 1-2 strengths and areas of opportunity for the SLT, what would you highlight?
    - An area of opportunity could be a challenge or it could be something you want to do more
- Thinking more specifically about your own participation in the SLT, what are 1-2 moments you believe you really added to the work of the team and 1-2 moments where you held back or might have added more? Be as specific as possible if you can remember

Diving More Deeply

- What is your current understanding of the purpose of the SLT?
    - How confident are you this purpose will have a positive impact for students?
- What is your understanding of your current role on the SLT?
    - If your role is clear, when did that happen? If your role is unclear, what areas remain most in question to you?
- Do you identify any ways that your work has connected more deeply to others through work with the SLT?
    - Which other senior leaders do you work most closely with in your day-to-day work?
- Do you think your opinion counts on the SLT?
    - We talked before about what your process might be if you disagreed with a decision or direction, what would your process be currently?
    - Do you feel like you are "in the loop" or have systems and opportunities for communication with other members of the team?
- Whom, if anyone on the SLT would you turn to for help now? Why?

    - Is there any person, or people, that you recognize as new thought partners since the launch of the SLT?
- How comfortable do you feel as a member of the SLT? What structures or opportunities do you see as providing opportunities to build relationships?
    - What would you suggest to further build relationships?
- After being on the SLT, whom do you recognize, if anyone, as the leader of the team? What is your perspective on the effectiveness of this leadership?
    - Do you feel you have been able to display your own leadership with the SLT?
    - What would the conditions need to be in order for you to display your leadership even more?
- Can you recall what the goals for our work together as an SLT? *The two goals are strong implementation and intentional communication – if prompting is required*
    - What systems and structures can you identify as assisting us in reaching these goals?
    - What suggestions do you have for ways we could make more progress?
- Do you see this team making real time progress on implementing the SOP? If yes, how? If no, why not?
- The SLT effort to reach stated goals has not necessarily been linear this year. Can you recall any instances where the SLT has had to change course or should have changed course to implement the SOP more effectively?
- What is your impression of the use of Data Wise as a process for improving practice within the SLT?
    - Do you feel comfortable or knowledgeable about the basic steps of the process?
    - What additional support, if any, would increase your investment in a continuous improvement process such as Data Wise?

Closing 1:1

- Are there any questions you have for me?
- What, if anything, would you like to see me do with the information you provided me with today?
- Thank you for taking the time to talk to me!

Appendix 6. Sample Senior Leadership Team Agendas

Purpose: to learn together in order to strengthen our service and support to schools; to do strategic problem solving and planning; to enhance communication and collaboration; and to ensure coherence and alignment across the organization.

HPS Senior Leadership Team Meeting
October 1, 2015

Meeting Objectives:

- To monitor & reflect on progress on the implementation of the Acceleration Agenda so as to learn and iterate on our practices
- (To review the annual targets set for Acceleration Agenda schools in order to increase the growth rate and fulfill our SOP Equity Indicators' promise)
- To engage in problem solving around a specific aspect of the Acceleration Agenda (i.e.: systems & processes)

Agenda:

Time	Topic	Facilitators
9:00-9:15	**Opening** • Agenda overview • Framing of our Acceleration Agenda Work today (through a Data Wise Process Continuum) • Teambuilding: Who Are We?	Jonathan
9:15-9:20	**Check in on Previous Action Items** Have these actions happened? Or, where are we in the process? • Look at SIP goals to build from the ground up to determine targets for each AA school (Jeron will connect with Associate Superintendents) • To figure out a rate of accelerated growth for AA schools and others (far below the mark) to have them meet our promise in 5 years	Jill
9:20-10:15	**Acceleration Agenda: ANET—What has happened thus far?** • Overview of the Teaching and Learning Cycle • Impact Case Study: Planning from Standards • Vision for the Year: Individual School Plans & Leadership Development • Status of the Work: Where are we? How do we know it is working or not? What are the plans/measures for future monitoring? • Supports Needed from the District / Gaps Identified	ANET Jonathan

10:15-10:45	**Acceleration Agenda: Step Back & Reflect – Practicing the Language of Deconstructive Feedback** • What else are we learning through implementation? • Where do we go next? What is the role of SLT to address the gaps expressed by ANET and Associate Superintendents (individually & collectively)?	Jonathan Jill
10:45-10:55	**Break**	
10:55-11:30	**Acceleration Agenda: Systems and Processes** • What structures & processes do we need to have in place to create conditions necessary for effective implementation & success? • How do we ensure alignment and coherence?	Jonathan
11:30-11:50	**Roundtable** • Board Leadership Meeting on October 6th @ 12pm (Agenda Items & Who Should Be Present?) • Board Workshop: Family and Community Engagement October 6th (be present) • Reminder: Cabinet Meeting October 8th (Academics/High School Centers of Innovation) & SLT Meeting October 15th (Carol and Cate—Schools) • Updates on Core Work and Current Projects & Issues?	Jill
11:50–12:00	**Key Messages:** • Strong Implementation • Strong & Intentional Communication • What are the key messages we need to communicate? To whom?	Jonathan

Team Norms

- Honoring all voices and monitoring one's own air time
- Seek understanding/clarification before trying to be understood
- Assume positive intention
- Focus on what WE should/can do (as opposed to just what we expect of/from others)
- Engage in root cause analysis & reflection (i.e.: "5-Whys")
- Bring ideas/solutions (in addition to problems)
- Honor team decisions, exercise transparency/clear communication, and close loops
- Stay focused (create parking lots for things that come up during meetings)
- Choose truth over peace
- Attend to team's learning
- Confidentiality
- Hold time sacred (for weekly meetings)

Purpose: to learn together in order to strengthen our service and support to schools; to do strategic problem solving and planning; to enhance communication and collaboration; and to ensure coherence and alignment across the organization.

HPS Cabinet Meeting
December 10, 2015

Meeting Objectives:

- To engage in data analysis and guided discussion about implementation, progress, and problems of practice impacting the college and career readiness opportunities available to our students
- To raise understanding of where we are in our facilities usage and work collectively to sharpen the proposals being presented to the superintendent

To Prepare:

- Come prepared to be engaged

Agenda:

Time	Topic	Facilitators
9:00-9:05	**Opening** • Agenda overview	Beth N
9:05-9:15	**Teambuilding**	Jennifer A
9:15-9:30	**Check in on Previous Action Items** Have these actions happened? Or, where are we in the process? • Update on the Problem of Practice surrounding ELLs • City Connects quick update • Update on Problem of Practice surrounding Chronic Absenteeism	Jonathan S Deidre T Jonathan/ Gislaine
9:30-10:30	**Academic Indicators: Progress towards achieving our College and Career Readiness goals** • Where are we in the implementation plan? • What was the impact of our practice to date? • What are our strategies to address this going forward? ○ What trends do we see in the schools that are flagged at this point?	Sonia D

	○ What cross-functional interventions or communication can we employ here? ○ Where are we stuck?	
10:30-10:40	**Break**	
10:40-11:30	**Office of Operations Problem of Practice: Criteria for developing 5-year plan** • Recent historical context of the district's facilities • Current operational state of Zone 1 and Zone 2 schools • Guiding Questions: ○ What priorities should operations use as criteria to determine the recommendations for the upcoming facilities plan? ○ What factors should be considered in the planning process to ensure the success of this work?	Don S Claudio B
11:30-11:50	**Roundtable** • Family Friendly Schools Event Debrief • Upcoming Weaver Project meetings • Upcoming BOE meeting items? • Others?	Deidre Gislaine
11:50-11:55	**Plus / Delta Protocol** • What worked well to facilitate your learning and open conversation? • What could work better to facilitate your learning and conversation?	Gislaine
11:55–12:00	**Key Messages:** • Strong Implementation • Strong & Intentional Communication • What are the key messages we need to communicate? To whom?	Beth

Team Norms

- Honoring all voices and monitoring one's own air time
- Seek understanding/clarification before trying to be understood
- Assume positive intention
- Focus on what WE should/can do (as opposed to just what we expect of/from others)
- Engage in root cause analysis & reflection (i.e.: "5-Whys")
- Bring ideas/solutions (in addition to problems)
- Honor team decisions, exercise transparency/clear communication, and close loops
- Stay focused (create parking lots for things that come up during meetings)
- Choose truth over peace
- Attend to team's learning
- Confidentiality
- Hold time sacred (for weekly meetings)

Appendix 7. Formal Survey Instruments

Baseline Survey – Administered August 2015[4]
Hartford Public Schools (HPS) is in the midst of aligning district actions with the current Strategic Operating Plan to achieve Equity and Excellence in all HPS schools. One strategy for HPS to approach this work is through focusing on adult learning and strong school support networks. In addition, HPS aims to be disciplined and strategic in the use of data as a tool for improvement. Therefore, this Professional Learning team is excited to begin the process of implementing the Data Wise Improvement Process (DWIP) together with you. Our hope is that adopting a particular improvement process will help to build a strong community of practice and build on the work that is already happening in your school. When we work together, we can share our learning, successes, and challenges throughout this process.

Data Wise is a process that involves the entire school community and in this case central office as well. Each team asks questions about their practice in the classroom, throughout the school building, and across schools. Through cycles of inquiry, staff works to improve student outcomes, increase engagement in the improvement process, and create opportunities for their own adult learning.

The purpose of this anonymous survey is to gather information about how you currently understand your role in HPS and your individual assessment of where your team is in the inquiry and learning processes. I understand that this survey is self-evaluative and that each person experiences the environment differently. Therefore, I want to stress that being honest in your evaluations is critical. Please complete this survey based on your personal opinion and knowledge of HPS core work. This survey should take about 10 minutes to complete.

Drop down background info questions:
What is your primary role?
Associate Superintendent
Cabinet Member

How many years have you worked for HPS?
How long have you been in your current position?
0-1 year
2-4 years
5-7 years
7-10 years
10+ years

[4] This survey is adapted from three sources including a Gallup Organization Poll, Data Wise Improvement Process, and a Team Psychological Safety Survey Instrument (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2013; Buckingham, 1999; Edmondson, 1998).

For this first set of questions, please indicate the extent to which you engage in each of the Data Wise Improvement practices currently in your core work at Hartford Public Schools. Use the scale from 1-5. Here a score of 1 means your team is not yet engaging in this work, 3 means you do the work inconsistently or it happens in pockets, and 5 means your school really engages in this practice in a consistent way. For each response, make sure that you can recall evidence that leads you to this assessment.

These next questions are to determine if your team is PREPARING for an improvement process.

Your school team Organizes for Collaborative Work. By organizing for collaborative work, we mean:

- Adopts an improvement process
- Builds a strong system of teams
- Makes time for collaborative work
- Sets expectations for effective meetings
- Sets norms for collaborative work
- Acknowledges work style preferences
- Creates a data inventory
- Creates an inventory of instructional initiatives

Your team Builds Assessment Literacy. By building assessment literacy, we mean:

- Reviews skills tested
- Studies how results are reported
- Learns principles of responsible data use

The next questions are to determine the extent to which your school-based team is INQUIRING as a tool for improvement.

Your team Creates a Data Overview. By creating a data overview, we mean:

- Chooses a focus area
- Analyzes data and finds the story
- Displays the data
- Allows staff members to make sense of the data and identify a priority question

Your team Digs into Data. By digging into data, we mean:

- Examine a wide range of student data
- Come to a shared understanding of what student data shows
- Identify a learner-centered problem

Your team Examines Instruction. By examining instruction, we mean:

- Examines a wide range of instructional data
- Gets clear about the purpose of observation
- Comes to a shared understanding of what is happening in classrooms
- Identifies a problem of practice

The next questions are to determine the extent to which your team is ACTING on plans for improvement.

Your team Creates an Action Plan. By creating an action plan, we mean:

- Decides on an instructional strategy
- Agrees on what the plan will look like in classrooms
- Puts the plan in writing

Your team Plans to Assess Progress. By planning to assess progress, we mean:

- Chooses assessments to measure progress
- Sets student learning goals

Your team Acts and Assesses. By act and assess, we mean:

- Implements the action plan
- Assesses implementation
- Assess student learning
- Adjusts the action plan
- Celebrates success!

For the next set of questions, the purpose is to understand the conditions we are creating at Hartford Public Schools. Please respond with the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements based on the role that. Use a 1-5 scale where 1 means you strongly disagree and 5 mean you strongly agree.

In my daily work, I know what is expected of me.

I have all the materials and equipment I need to do my work well.

I have an opportunity to do what I do best every day.

I have received recognition for my work in the past seven days.

My supervisor, or someone at work, cares about me.

At work, someone encourages my professional development.

I have made personal progress in the last six months.

My opinion counts at work.

I believe in the mission/purpose of my company.

My coworkers are committed to high-quality work.

I have a best friend at work.

I have opportunities to learn and grow.

For the next set of questions, the purpose is to learn more about your personal development with the context of your role at Hartford Public Schools. Please respond with the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements. Use a 1-5 scale where 1 means you strongly disagree and 5 means you strongly agree.

Hartford Public Schools helps you identify a personal challenge that you can work on in order to grow.

There are others who are aware of this "growing edge," and who care that you transcend it.

You are given supports to overcome your limitations.

You experience yourself actively working on transcending this growing edge on a daily, or at least weekly basis.

More particularly, after you perform the essence of your work – whether running a meeting, coaching, or working with students – You have some process in place by which you are helped to see how you could have done any of these things better.

In addition to any "growing edge" HPS might have helped you identify, you have personally identified a personal challenge that you can work on in order to grow.

You are comfortable sharing your personally identified challenge with others.

If yes, please share your personally identified challenge below:

Hartford Public Schools has helped you identify a challenge, you have also personally identified a challenge, and these goals are one and the same.

If Hartford Public Schools has helped you identify a challenge and you have also personally identified a challenge, and they are aligned. (If they are the same, select 5)

What is one way that HPS has helped you grow personally and professionally?

What is one way that HPS could help you grow more personally and professionally?

Thank you so much for taking the time to complete this survey. Your continued support with collecting this information periodically will allow me to assess how well we are supporting you as leaders, continue practices that you feel are working, and give us direction on how to adjust as we engage in our own development process. This will ensure continued learning for us all.

Data Wise Scorecard

Directions: Highlight each key task you have actively experienced in the SLT. Then give each task a score of 0, ½, or 1. On the right, suggest what task SLT should focus on next.

Step	Key Tasks	Score	What Next?
1 Organize for Collaborative Work	Adopt an improvement process Build a strong system of teams Make time for collaborative work Set expectations for effective meetings Set norms for collaborative work Acknowledge work style preferences Create a data inventory Create an inventory of practice initiatives		
2 Build Data Literacy	Review skills tested Study how results are reported Learn principles of responsible data use		
3 Create a Data Overview	Choose a **focus area** Analyze data, find the story Display the data Allow staff members to make sense of the data and identify a **priority question**		
4 Dig Into Data	Examine a wide range of data Come to a shared understanding of what the data show Identify a **learner-centered problem**		
5 Examine Own Practice	Examine a wide range of practice data Get clear about the purpose of observation Come to a shared understanding of what is happening in our work Identify a **problem of practice**		
6 Develop Action Plan	Decide on strategies of practice Agree on what the plan will look like in our work Put the plan in writing		
7 Plan to Assess Progress	7.1 Choose assessments or evidence sources to measure progress 7.2 Set target goals		
8 Act and Assess	8.1 Implement the action plan 8.2 Assess learning and performance 8.3 Adjust the action plan 8.4 Celebrate success		
	Based on all the things you suggested as the next level of work, what do you believe is the highest leverage area of work for this cabinet to improve?	/31	

Team Assessment

5 Dysfunctions of a Team

Using the scale below, indicate how each statement applies to the your team. Please briefly evaluate the statements without over-thinking your answers.

3 = Usually 2 = Sometimes 1 = Rarely

_____ 1. Team members are passionate and unguarded in their discussion of issues.

_____ 2. Team members call out one another's deficiencies or unproductive behaviors.

_____ 3. Team members know what their peers are working on and how they Contribute to the collective good of the team.

_____ 4. Team members quickly and genuinely apologize to one another when they say or do something inappropriate or possibly damaging to the team.

_____ 5. Team members willingly make sacrifices (such as budget, turf, head count) in their departments or areas of expertise for the good of the team.

_____ 6. Team members openly admit their weaknesses and mistakes.

_____ 7. Team meetings are compelling and not boring.

_____ 8. Team members leave meetings confident that their peers are completely committed to the decisions that were agreed on, even if there was initial disagreement.

_____ 9. Morale is significantly affected by the failure to achieve team goals.

_____ 10. During team meetings, the most important—and difficult—issues are put on table to be resolved.

_____ 11. Team members are deeply concerned about the prospect of letting down their peers.

_____ 12. Team members know about one another's personal lives and are comfortable discussing them.

_____ 13. Team members end discussions with clear and specific resolutions and calls to action.

_____ 14. Team members challenge one another about their plans and approaches.

_____ 15. Team members are slow to seek credit for their own contributions, but quick to point out those of others.

Appendix 8. Observation Template

Interaction Type:
Meeting
1:1
Informal Conversation
Shadowing Superintendent
3rd Party Observer

People Present: **Date:**

SLT Learning Goals: Intentional Communication; Strong Implementation
What, if any, documents or structures are in place to aid …
communication?

implementation?

What meaning was constructed from the _____ communication?
verbal

nonverbal

What connection, if any was made to strong implementation?

Additional Notes: